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## PRECARITY IN PARADISE: TOURISM, MIGRATION, AND THE BROADER CAUSES OF INSTABILITY IN ROATÁN, HONDURAS

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PRECARITY IN PARADISE: TOURISM, MIGRATION, AND THE BROADER  
CAUSES OF INSTABILITY IN ROATÁN, HONDURAS

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Heather Jan Sawyer

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Sarah Lyon, Professor of Anthropology

Lexington, Kentucky

2018

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### PRECARITY IN PARADISE: TOURISM, MIGRATION, AND THE BROADER CAUSES OF INSTABILITY IN ROATÁN, HONDURAS

Since the 1990s, the population on the Honduran island of Roatán has grown from around 20,000 (mostly English-speaking Islanders) to roughly 100,000 residents (at least half of which are native Spanish-speaking Ladinos from the Honduran mainland) (*Bay Islands Voice* 2014b). This population growth has occurred alongside increasing forms of economic and environmental precarity that have fueled widespread instability on the island. While ethnic tensions between Ladinos and Islanders have existed since colonial times, conflict between the groups reached a crescendo in 2014 after the murder of a cruise ship employee in Roatán by a Ladino migrant. This sparked a security crisis for the island's idyllic tourism industry.

In an effort to address growing security concerns, municipal authorities proposed a plan that included the installation of surveillance cameras in key population centers, use of 24-hour police patrols, and implementation of an identification program to track migration to the island. Authorities argued Ladino migrants were not only an ecological burden on the island, but also a major source of criminal activity, leading to the tourism industry's instability. Yet, while stakeholders of island tourism were quick to cite Ladino migration as a major source of precarity, my research shows its causes are much broader and more complex. I argue simply blaming population growth – without a nuanced analysis of emerging human-environment relationships – does little to explain the multifaceted causes of instability in Roatán's tourism industry.

Drawing on twelve months of ethnographic research, I find the instability in Roatán's tourism industry is more fully explained through four overlapping crises playing out across Honduras for the majority poor, including: a lack of physical and political representation, struggles over land rights, social and economic immobilities, and disappearing childhood.



I examine this precarity as part of wider trends in global capitalism (e.g. increased expulsions of people from their lands), but also as something inextricably local in nature (e.g. filtered through a Ladino threat narrative). My analysis contributes to broader conversations occurring in the field of anthropology about how to discern and make sense of the growing forms of precarity humans face. For example, Sassen (2014) argues pinpointing the causes of precarity, such as those shaping life in Roatán, has grown more challenging as complex constellations of power obscure direct causal relationships. Parsing out the complicated relationships between formations of power on the Honduran mainland and growing sources of precarity on Roatán is one way I add to this body of literature. My research also contributes to this issue through examinations of the everyday cultural productions of value, meaning, and hope that emerge through engagements with the tourism industry—and how they anchor people amidst the backdrop of escalating uncertainty.

KEYWORDS: marine conservation, eco-tourism, land rights, childhood, mobility

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July 11, 2018

PRECARITY IN PARADISE: TOURISM, MIGRATION, AND THE BROADER  
CAUSES OF INSTABILITY IN ROATÁN, HONDURAS

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“They say the Caribbean kept a secret for many years. The colors of a reef rich with life, a landscape with a turquoise blue horizon and mountains covered with tropical jungle would be the signs on a map that leads to this Honduran natural treasure.*

*That map would say its 125 sq. km/48 sq. miles to its islands and cays, are the way that the Caribbean defines paradise. The final sign that you have arrived is in its crystal waters, your footprints melting in the soft ivory sands.*

*Today, 1 million people a year find this map, arriving on direct plane flights, cruise ships and ferries, to find a treasure that will not fit in a box.*

*Here you can go scuba or snorkel, take a sailboat, motorboat or kayak, fly over the sea or dive deep in a submarine, swim with dolphins, walk amongst iguanas, share with Garifunas and eat the ocean’s finest bounty.*

*Ah ... they say you’ll hear the pirate legends ... So, are you coming?”*

-Description of the island of Roatán by The Honduran National Chamber of Tourism (CANATURH) (*Honduras Travel 2018*).

April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014. A Norwegian Cruise Lines cook named Jacob Gaban, a Filipino man, disembarked a ship docked on the Honduran island of Roatán to take a short break from his duties. Walking off the ship, he entered the town of Coxen Hole, the commercial center of the island. Once there, he sat outside a small store to pick up a WIFI signal for approximately two hours. Around 2:30 p.m., an armed man approached Jacob on a bicycle. The man demanded his electronic device (it is unknown whether it was a cell phone or tablet) but Jacob refused to give it to him. The armed man fired his gun. A bullet ripped through Jacob’s arm and into his torso. This first shot sent Jacob to the ground. As he held his bleeding wound, he attempted to get back on his feet. But the



armed bicyclist shot him a second time – this time in the head – and killed him. The man then took Jacob’s device and fled on foot through a nearby alley and disappeared while witnesses stood by in horror. This incident marked a moment of crisis for the island’s idyllic tourism industry.

Norwegian Cruise Lines cancelled the remainder of their stops to Roatán for the season. This in turn caused Cruising Excursions, a company that operates tours in Roatán, to cancel their activities as well. A spokesman for the company said this event was considered a tipping point after a recent flurry of crime in Roatán, stating “A string of reports of robberies, violence against visitors and now this horrific murder have forced us to suspend our cruise excursion programme on this beautiful island” (Paris, 2014). Online cruise ship forums warned would-be tourists about the risks of visiting Roatán (which was soon-after declared the second most dangerous port in the Caribbean, in part due to this incident). And the local news covered the story, interviewing panicked citizens who described the hardships they would endure as a result of diminishing tourism dollars. This crisis highlighted growing sources of instability shaping island tourism and laid bare the precarity of local livelihoods.



Figure 1.1: Store in Coxen Hole. This is where Jacob Gaban picked up a WIFI signal before being shot. From *Bay Islands Voice* (2014a).



Figure 1.2: The bench where Jacob Gaban sat before being shot. From *Bay Islands Voice* (2014a).

In response to the murder, action from Roatán's municipal government was uncharacteristically swift. A 170,000 Lempira reward (approximately \$8,000 USD) was offered for information leading to the arrest of the armed bicyclist, nearly double an average yearly salary in Honduras (CIA 2018). The reward money encouraged acquaintances of the alleged shooter, Lomder Lone Guzmán Ramirez, just twenty-years-old, to devise a plan leading to his capture. Local rumors swirled that Ramirez was attempting to sell the murder weapon so he could flee the island and seek refuge on the Honduran mainland. The acquaintances came up with the idea to lure Ramirez into a police trap by pretending to buy the weapon from him. They proposed meeting in El Swampo (The Swamp) neighborhood of Coxen Hole, a reputedly crime-ridden area, to make the exchange. Ramirez agreed to the plan. Once he got to the neighborhood, authorities succeeded in capturing him (after first shooting him in the leg). He was then sent to jail to await trial for simple homicide, robbery and illegal possession of a firearm.

Honduras' majority poor infrequently enjoy this sort of quick action against crime. The judicial system is deeply skewed in favor of the wealthy and powerful, as the apprehension of Ramirez demonstrates (since his crime threatened the stability of island revenue). For example, Alonso (2016) argues that Honduras has:

a criminal justice system which lacks a cohesive plan to combat corruption and where bureaucratic inefficiency is systemic. These failings allow high-level corruption to occur with relative impunity, while low-level offenders are paraded through the court system to create the appearance of justice being served.

Given this context, the local municipal government's role in the successful capture of Ramirez was a confidence boost for the newly elected mayor, Dorn Ebanks, and his ability to combat crime. Just months earlier, Ebanks unveiled a controversial new

security plan for the island, which included installing surveillance cameras in major population centers around Roatán. The shooting of Jacob Gaban happened to be recorded by one of these newly installed cameras and helped secure the timely capture of Ramirez. Mayor Ebanks and his recently appointed security advisor, Billy Joya, capitalized on this success by announcing through local media outlets that the security cameras could be credited with helping local police identify the alleged gunman.

But the timely capture of Ramirez proved to be further validation of the mayor's security plan because the shooter was ethnically Ladino (mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage). Although he had family living on the island at the time of the murder, Ramirez was not locally considered an ethnic Islander (from a black or white English-speaking family with historic ties to the island). Instead, he was a Spanish-speaking immigrant from the Honduran mainland. This was significant because during the unveiling of mayor Ebanks' security plan, municipal authorities argued Ladino migrants were in part an ecological burden on the island, but also a major source of criminal activity in Roatán, leading to the tourism industry's instability. Accordingly, the security plan proposed not only increasing forms of surveillance (via video cameras and police patrols), but also the enactment of an identification program that would limit and track Ladino migration to the island. The fact that Ramirez is Ladino helped reinforce the migrant threat narrative underpinning the mayor's plan.

These developments unfolded amidst a backdrop of heightened ethnic and racial conflict on the island. While tensions between Ladinos and Islanders have existed since colonial times, the past twenty-five years have exhibited a sharp increase in hostilities (Stonich 2000). Since the 1990s, the island's population has grown from around 20,000

mostly English-speaking Islanders to roughly 100,000 residents – at least half of whom are native Spanish-speaking Ladinos from the Honduran mainland (*Bay Islands Voice* 2014b). This population growth has occurred alongside increasing forms of economic and environmental uncertainty in Roatán. And, while stakeholders of island tourism are quick to cite Ladino migration as a major source of growing instability for the industry, my research shows the sources of tourism precarity are much broader and more complex.

I argue simply blaming population growth, without a nuanced analysis of the links between population and environment, does little to explain the complex causes of instability in Roatán's tourism industry. The migrant threat narrative overlooks three important factors: First, my research shows stakeholders lacked a clear understanding of the everyday lives and livelihoods of migrants – including the roles they played in island tourism. For example, while municipal authorities argued Ladino migrants struggled to integrate into the island's tourism industry as a result of their backgrounds in agricultural work, I found this to be an inaccurate portrayal of migrant livelihoods. To the contrary, migrants were especially adept at utilizing their limited resources and training to reinvent their livelihoods in Roatán's tourism landscape. Second, local stakeholders overlooked the political and cultural factors shaping migrant livelihoods and land use, and therefore had a superficial understanding of the complex causes of pollution in the island's marine protected area. And third, stakeholders disregarded the underlying political and economic conditions prompting Ladinos to leave the mainland. These conditions (continue to) cause instability for the region as a whole and work in complex ways to destabilize tourism in Roatán. Yet, municipal efforts towards island security address the symptom of regional instability (Ladino migration) and not the myriad causes of that

instability. Without addressing these sources of instability, I argue surveillance policies have little chance at actually stabilizing island tourism. Further, I argue the increased surveillance of Ladinos and other marginalized island residents fosters economic and social unpredictability and harm, undermining efforts to stabilize island tourism.

My research finds the instability in Roatán's tourism industry is more fully understood in terms of four overlapping crises afflicting the region's majority poor, playing out across Honduras and the region more broadly, and part of larger patterns of precarity. Chapters in this dissertation are organized around these four thematic crises, which include: a lack of physical and political representation, social and economic immobilities, struggles over land rights, and disappearing childhood. I find while these broader issues coalesce to foster precarity in Roatán's tourism industry, the lived experiences of this precarity cannot be divorced from local cultural particularities.

For example, a primary way stakeholders make sense of the growing instability of island tourism is through a *Ladino threat narrative*. My conceptualization and use of a Ladino threat narrative in Roatán is inspired by ethnographic research conducted by Leo Chavez on Latino migration in the United States. In his book, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizen, and the Nation* (2013), Chavez examines the ways in which migrant threat narratives are used to exert power over migrant groups. Chavez builds on Foucauldian insights into the links between surveillance, definitions of citizenship, and the control of populations. He argues migrant threat narratives gain power as they come to constitute "virtual" lives of migrants in the minds of others. These imagined lives are then used as the basis for policy and other action, even if they do not reflect reality. Threat narratives can therefore be used as forms of governance, which

challenge claims to citizenship and shape economic and social mobilities.

It is my goal to both broaden and refine Chavez's conceptualization of a migrant threat narrative by examining how locally particular histories contour conflict between ethnic groups (such as overlapping land tenure models between Ladinos and Islanders), and how this, in turn, intersects with broader economic and environmental conditions (such as the proliferation of land expulsions worldwide).

While the Ladino threat narrative in Roatán functions as a primary way for stakeholders of island tourism to make sense of the industry's precarity, the perception of a Ladino "threat" in Roatán has historical underpinnings stemming from colonial conflict between Honduran mainlanders and Islanders. In order to understand how these tensions came about, a review of the historical emergence of tourism development, along with the rise of economic and environmental uncertainty in Roatán, is useful.



Figure 1.3: The location of Roatán. From [www.jamaicacruise.com](http://www.jamaicacruise.com)

### Roatán: A Sunny Place for Shady People

Roatán is a small island located approximately thirty miles off the Caribbean coast of Honduras. At three miles wide by thirty miles long, it is the largest of three main islands comprising Roatán's Bay Islands (Islas de la Bahia) (along with several smaller cays). The proliferation of the tourism industry in Roatán over the last several decades has been impressive. In 1969, only 900 tourists visited Roatán. In 1990 there were 15,000 tourist arrivals. Ten years later, in 2000, this number climbed to 100,000 visitors. By 2010, the island had 900,000 annual tourist arrivals, and in 2011 that number had



reached 1.2 million (Doiron and Weissenberger 2014). In 2017, Honduras welcomed more than two million tourists, generating more than \$700 million in spending (Honduras' total GDP in 2016 was \$21.52 billion USD). Over half of these visitors were cruise ship tourists (Taylor 2018). From November of 2016 to March of 2017 (the cruise ship high season), Roatán had 1.2 million cruise ship passengers arrive on the island. Each passenger is estimated to spend around \$80 while in port, potentially generating around \$96 million for the island's economy.

While these numbers seem to bode well for island tourism, the proliferation of tourist arrivals threatens Roatán's aesthetic as a rustic, undiscovered Caribbean gem. Many in the expat community describe Roatán as a "gritty Margaritaville". I've also heard it affectionately called "a sunny place for shady people." Roatán exemplifies the ideal tropical paradise for budget travelers and adventure-seekers. It is less developed and cheaper than many other tourist destinations in the Caribbean while maintaining much of the offbeat charm expats and tourists have come to expect from such a place. The island experiences frequent power outages. Many ATMs on the island have been hacked by thieves and will steal your identity when used (I had my identity stolen three times while conducting fieldwork). Dogs and chickens roam the streets freely. And the island is small enough that you can get to know some local characters even if you stay just a few days.

One striking feature of Roatán is its amazing sounds. There are sounds from nature – most of the island is protected by coral reefs – meaning waves crash gently on its shores. This creates a soothing backdrop to daily life that juxtaposes with the ever-present, energetic sounds put forth by Roatán's residents. Walking through either

community of West End or West Bay (two main tourists areas on the island), you are bombarded with taxi drivers yelling “Taxi, lady? Want a taxi?” or sometimes they simply honk to ask if you need a ride. Roatán is also filled with other beachside venders who are constantly communicating with potential clients. They sell bracelets, bootlegged DVDs, cigars, wooden carvings, or offer services such as massages or hair braiding. Each vendor has their own unique style and they often employ charming tactics to sell their goods. The “Banana Donut Guy” (real name Milton Herrera) is a tourist favorite. He has a look that makes him easy to identify: white beard, straw hat, and is always carrying a clear plastic tub filled with donuts. He walks the beaches yelling out “bananaaaaa donut” over and over in a melodic tone. Sort of like a human version of an ice cream truck, beachgoers flock to him when they hear him stroll by. Adding to his adoration, he has an outgoing personality and loves posing for pictures or videos with groups of tourists.



Figure 1.4: Banana Donut Guy on West Bay Beach. From *Honduras Tips* (2018).

The main tourist activities in Roatán center on the nearby Meso-American barrier reef, and the island is mostly known for its scuba diving and snorkeling, and to a lesser extent for its charter fishing and glass-bottom boat tours. Others visit the island to enjoy time on Roatán's beautiful beaches, sample local food, partake in the nightlife, visit the local iguana sanctuary, or zip-line through the jungle. The island also has a small archaeology museum, dolphin show, and houses a few marine research labs. Cruise ship tourism is also a growing industry, and Roatán has two different ports that receive visitors.

Roatán has its own distinct linguistic and ethnic identity that sets it apart from the Honduran mainland. This distinctness stems from the Colonial Era, which facilitated a diverse mix of individuals inhabiting the Bay Islands. Over 150 years, occupation of Roatán oscillated between Spain and Britain. During this period, a cycle of British occupation, followed by Spanish expulsion occurred three times. Honduras eventually obtained ownership of Roatán in 1859 as a result of the Wykes-Cruz Treaty. The island's most consistent population throughout this colonial conflict was comprised of English-speaking individuals who were either British nationals or freed slaves of African descent.

As a result, Islanders actively resisted the treaty that gave ownership of Roatán to Honduras. The Honduran government quickly squashed uprisings against their sovereignty, in part through violence, and in part through efforts to extinguish the Bay Island's cultural identity. For example, the government made several attempts to "Hispanicize" the island (through tactics such as forbidding the use of English in schools and appointing Spanish speaking government officials). These actions contributed to the deep, enduring tensions between Islander and Ladino Hondurans. Today, many Islanders

still feel an alliance with the U.S. or other English-speaking enclaves in the Caribbean such as Belize (Stonich 2000).

Roatán remained relatively detached politically, economically and ethnically from the Honduran mainland until the 1980s. In the early 1980's the Honduran government started the aggressive promotion of tourism as an economic development strategy. The three major tourism areas promoted were the archaeological ruins at Copan, the beaches of the country's north coast, and the Bay Islands. Today, Roatán has the most developed tourism industry of the three Bay Islands, and proportionately brings in more tourists than mainland Honduras (Stonich 1998, 2000).

Efforts to encourage the growth of these tourist activities were largely based on neoliberal tenets. In the mid 1990's, the Honduran government declared Roatán an official tourism area (tourism free zone) and took measures to ensure its economic development through the enactment of several pieces of legislation. They gave substantial incentives to foreign investors. For example, benefits included: the ability to obtain 100% foreign ownership of land; the right to operate businesses without paying federal and municipal taxes; no duties or taxes were placed on any imports; and any equipment used in developing the tourism industry could be replaced tax free. Foreign investors also had access to financing through the Foundation for Investment and Development (FIDE), a para-statal organization (Stonich 1998).

But by the late 1990s, the quality of the Bay Islands' natural resources (including the nearby Meso-American coral reef) were under threat from the boom in infrastructural and tourism development. Deforestation, increased sedimentation, loss of mangroves, and diminishing quantities of fish were among the most pressing issues. Additionally,

there was a lack of potable drinking water for many residents as well as a lack of sewage and solid waste disposal systems. The declining environmental quality also constrained livelihood options, which since the Colonial Era, had been based on commercial and subsistence fishing.

In an attempt to protect the natural and marine resources of the Bay Islands, the Sandy Bay – West End Marine Reserve was established in 1998 and integrated into Honduras' National System of Protected Areas. The establishment of the marine protected area was meant to fulfill several objectives. According to the national government, the major goal was “to promote economic development through the rational exploitation of renewable and nonrenewable resources, especially through the least destructive means, tourism and recreation” (Stonich 2000, 92). The Roatán Marine Park and the Bay Islands Conservation Association are the two non-profit organizations that have been given authority by the Honduran government to manage the reserve. While both organizations have launched an array of programs and policies to improve the ecological quality of the island and its nearby reef system, they have struggled to keep pace with the impacts of tourism development.

One significant threat to Roatán's marine protected area is the growth of a Ladino migrant neighborhood called La Colonia, located adjacent to the marine reserve. Since Roatán's tourism boom in the 1990's, many poor Spanish-speaking Ladinos from the Honduran mainland began migrating to Roatán in search of work in the tourism industry. La Colonia plays an important role in reef health due to the neighborhood's ecological characteristics. La Colonia sits on a rugged hilltop above a section of Roatán's marine protected area and is comprised of 4 smaller communities. These communities are

located along a series of tributaries that feed into a larger stream. Together, these tributaries are called the Sandy Bay Watershed, which flows down the hillside of La Colonia and discharges below into the marine protected area.

The largely unmitigated growth of the neighborhood resulted in significant deforestation, leading to sedimentation of the Sandy Bay Watershed and ultimately affecting the reef below. Raw sewage is also a concern as the neighborhood lacks most types of basic infrastructure, while current levels of fecal coliform pose a serious threat to the reef. Due to the importance of the ecological vitality of the Sandy Bay Watershed for Roatán's marine conservation efforts, my research focuses on La Colonia, the Ladino migrants who live there, and the broader stakeholders of the nearby marine protected area. The three main communities located in Roatán's marine protected area are West End, West Bay, and Sandy Bay (including the Colonia). West Bay is the most developed tourist area, while West End is geared towards budget tourists. Sandy Bay is more residential but houses several resorts.



Figure 1.5: West Bay Beach, Roatán. Photo by author.



Figure 1.6: West Bay Beach, Roatán. Photo by author.





Figure 1.7: Half Moon Bay. Located in the community of West End. Photo by author.



Figure 1.8: Tourism Police Station, West End, Roatán. Photo by author.





Figure 1.9: Sundowners Bar. One of the most popular tourist bars in West End, showing a hockey game. Photo by author.



Figure 1.10: Sundowners Bar entrance to the beach. Photo by author.





Figure 1.11: Dolphin show at Anthony's Key Resort in Sandy Bay. Photo by author.



Figure 1.12: Dolphin trainers at Anthony's Key Resort in Sandy Bay. Photo by author.





Figure 1.13: Coxen Hole, the commercial center of the island. Photo by author.



Figure 1.14: A home on the remote east end of Roatán. Photo by author.

## Roatán's Ecological Crisis

*Our actions is really destroying our livelihood ... The thing that gives us that fancy lifestyle is the environment. We can't get around that. This island has one thing going for it. That's our reefs. Yeah, we got lovely beaches. So does the rest of the world. And maybe some pretty womens and good rum. That's all good stuff. But the main thing that attracted people and still do to this island is the diving. . .*

*I'm not blaming us alone for our reef. I find that some years the water temperature gets much hotter than it used to. ... I have very limited knowledge about this greenhouse effect. ... But I know for sure that this water gets much warmer than it used to 20 and 30 years ago. ... So how do we deal with that? It could be a global thing. What I see is the runoff. We can do something about that. . .*

- Alvin Jackson, lifelong resident of Roatán (From *Bay Islands Voice* 2013).

In 2013, the *Bay Islands Voice* (the leading English news publication in the region) interviewed a life-long resident of Roatán named Alvin Jackson. Jackson was one of the first dive instructors on the island and a founding member of the Roatán Marine Park, a non-profit established in the early 2000's to manage the island's marine protected area. His interview discusses the tradeoffs that have occurred as a result of tourism development on the island and highlights the island's current state of ecological crisis. He explains that Roatán now has doctors, lawyers, and electricity – none of which were common when Jackson was growing up in the 1950's. But it also wasn't hard to find a meal back then, he says, due to the abundance of marine life. Jackson describes in detail his ecological knowledge of the fish, conch, and lobster – both past and present – in the local waters, along with how the once vibrant and healthy coral reef is just a shadow of what it once was. Although Roatán's reef is relatively healthier than many other reefs in the world, Jackson estimates that today there is only about 40 percent of the hard coral

that was around 30 years ago.

Jackson's interview suggests that global warming has played a part in this decline through warming waters. He also points to the "things we can do something about," which refers to addressing the island's largely unmitigated tourism development and population growth. While the building of resorts, cruise ship facilities, and other tourism infrastructure are in part responsible for the island's ecological degradation, migration is also a major contributing factor in Roatán's ecological troubles (*Bay Islands Voice* 2014b).

#### Research Problem and Methods

Early on in my fieldwork I was explaining my research topic to a Ladino Honduran friend and research participant. Several times, I had mentioned mainland migrants as a focus of my study. She stopped me at one point, however, and said "But what migrants are you talking about? Me, for example?"

She knew I was referring to poor Ladinos who were moving to La Colonia, and she was a middle-upper class Honduran who moved to Roatán for a job with the government. Therefore, she was a mainland migrant too. But she made an important point and highlighted the need for me to be more explicit about the bigger picture of migration to Roatán.

While my research focuses on a specific group of Ladino migrants who are scapegoated as the cause of a range of problems in the island's tourism industry, this group is just part of the broader migration landscape on the island. It is difficult to obtain figures on how large these other groups are. But I know that other important groups that

make up the diverse migrant community on the island include: expats (primarily from the U.S., Canada, and England), middle and upper-class Hondurans, others from around Latin America (Argentina and Mexico, for example), and biologists and other researchers living on the island to address conservation issues. Black and white “Islanders” themselves, I should note, only came to the island years after the indigenous populations were killed through Spanish and English colonial conflict. The island, therefore, can be understood as a sort of crossroads, comprised of people from multiple, overlapping, flows of migrations spanning several hundred years. Today, all of these groups experience forms of economic, social, and other precarities that are negotiated differentially based on each person and group’s positionality.

What is distinct about migration now, however, is that population size is locally understood to be a major contributing factor to the precarity of Roatán’s tourism industry. And although Roatán’s marine protected area is meant to ensure the vitality of its coral reef, conservation efforts have not been able to fully protect island ecology in the midst of its growing population. Roatán is not alone in this problem. Today, more than twelve percent of the world’s surface is classified as protected and numerous development agencies, governments, and environmental organizations promote conservation as the foremost way to ensure the vitality of the earth’s natural resources in the midst of continued global ecological decline (WWF 2011). Rather than existing outside the purview of capitalist development, these conserved areas are often wed to tourism development in an effort to expand economies in ecologically and socially sustainable ways (Moreno 2005; Zimmerer & Carter 2002; Weaver 2004). However, conservation-based tourism development often prompts labor migrations resulting in diverse, complex

host communities as individuals in both nearby and far away places search for employment (Igoe 2009). These labor migrations can then create a paradox where conservation efforts lead to increased population pressures, producing new challenges for sustainable development efforts.

The relationships between tourism development, protected areas, and human populations have been a concerted area of focus for conservationists, policy makers, and researchers in the social sciences for the last few decades (Hoffman, Fay and Joppa 2011; Gray 2003). Important research has been conducted to highlight the human costs of protected areas, such as exclusion from natural resources (Himmelfarb 2006), conflicts over land-tenure (Mollett 2010; Brondo and Woods 2007) and increased economic marginalization (Dodds 1998). However, previous studies have typically focused on established communities with existing relationships with land. Very little research has been dedicated to understanding how conservation initiatives intersect with a growing global trend of migration to and near protected areas (Wittemyer et al. 2008).

Further, while the topic of neoliberal development has received much scholarly attention in recent years, scant research has been done to situate conservation strategies within this economic framework (Igoe et al. 2010). Igoe and Brockington (2007) argue that instead of representing the antithesis of ecological commodification, conservation initiatives have arisen concurrently with the spread of capitalism, reshaping how society and nature are valued. In Roatán, while environmental quality has decreased alongside a growth in island population, the specific links between population and environment are not well understood.

To address these issues, my research plan is drawn from a “linkages approach”

(Kottak 2006) in environmental anthropological research. This approach stresses that ecosystem quality is influenced by a variety of relationships between stakeholders. In order to understand these relationships, research methods should be multi-scalar and multi-actor focused. Accordingly, my research focuses not only on Ladino migrants living in La Colonia, but also on the local government, media reports, NGOs, and other stakeholders of the Sandy Bay Watershed. I conducted semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including: the Bay Islands Conservation Association and Roatán Marine Park (the two NGOs that manage Roatán's marine protected area), a Water Board director in La Colonia, a Patronato president (neighborhood council) in La Colonia, an employee of ZOLITUR (Zona Libre Turística, the company that manages Roatán's Tourism Free Zone), and an environmental engineer who has worked on projects in the neighborhood. I conducted textual analyses of newspaper and magazine articles about sources of tourism instability (both on the island as well as the mainland). I also attended meetings held by Roatán's municipal mayor and his security advisor about island security. Additionally, I conducted 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Ladino migrants living in La Colonia. Interviews typically lasted around an hour and a half each. I further got to know community members while doing volunteer work with local charities as well as NGOs, both in the neighborhood and around the island. I also spent five months working at Mahogany Bay, Carnival Cruise Lines' facility in Roatán.

I first visited Roatán in 2008, and subsequently spent close to three months working with conservation NGOs during preliminary research visits from 2009 – 2012. I carried out a 6-week internship with the Roatán Marine Park in 2009. During this time, I conducted surveys of business owners along Roatán's marine protected area about



conservation efforts, worked at their gift shop, and gave classroom presentations on coral reef ecology to schoolkids around the island. In 2011, I served as the Roatán Marine Park's volunteer coordinator on a project to build a conservation center out of plastic bottles with U.S. college students on a service trip. Over this time period, I also attended meetings with non-profit staff and the local government as well as other stakeholders of island tourism. Dissertation research was conducted from September 2013 – August 2014.

Prior to arriving in Roatán, I had secured research affiliation with the Roatán Marine Park. My assumption was that they would be able to help me make inroads in La Colonia, as they had contacts in the neighborhood and were monitoring the area for environmental quality. My initial research plan was to conduct a randomized sample of household surveys in one of the sections of the neighborhood through door-to-door interviews. These interviews would provide neighborhood-wide data about land claiming and use. But shortly after arriving in Roatán in September 2013, I realized I would need to alter my approach to be more sensitive to local politics surrounding land use issues as well as address safety concerns.

Once I got settled, I arranged a meeting with the Roatán Marine Park director to discuss my research. He explained that a few months before my arrival, their organization had worked with local authorities to conduct a census of neighborhood trees. Migrant squatting and the associated deforestation to build homes was becoming a major problem for the Sandy Bay watershed. In an effort to halt this sort of ecological damage, they documented trees through the use of GPS, so that any future deforestation could be proven in court. Cutting down trees is illegal in Roatán and a violation carries a hefty

fine. Squatting is also illegal. Not surprisingly, these surveillance efforts were causing bitter tensions between local authorities and neighborhood residents. As a result, I was told that if I went door to door in the neighborhood asking about things like land claiming, land use, and livelihoods, I would likely be interpreted as part of the surveillance effort to preserve trees and halt squatting. At best, I would not be spoken to. At worst, there were greater safety concerns. The NGO director had recently received death threats for trying to enforce conservation laws, so he warned me to be especially careful in the way I approached potential informants, as it could be dangerous.

The very real dangers of conducting fieldwork were made apparent soon after in other ways as well. Shortly after arriving in Roatán, I started volunteering with a local charity that was giving out shoes and school supplies to schoolchildren around the island (including La Colonia). I hoped this would help me meet people in the community in a non-threatening way. Through this work, I met a woman who lived at the base of La Colonia. She told me she went on daily walks through the neighborhood – starting at the main road and making her way up the steep mountainside. She said she'd be happy to take me with her on a walk to get to know the area. We made plans to get together soon after. But this minor success in gaining access to the community was short-lived. Unfortunately, before we could schedule a time to meet up, she was tragically murdered by her boyfriend.

Other events such as robberies, police solicitation of bribes, and home and business break-ins were extremely common throughout the island while I was there (not just in La Colonia). Although perceptions of danger can often be exaggerated in places where anthropologists conduct fieldwork, an acknowledgement of the very real dangers

anthropologists negotiate while in the field is a growing area of concern, especially in light of more recent efforts to understand the lived experience of violence and terror (Kovats-Bernat 2002). I found the best course of action while conducting fieldwork was to listen to island residents about how to engage with potential informants, as acts of violence were a fairly typical part of everyday life in Roatán that people negotiated. While not always successful, many residents had strategies for mitigating these forms of violence. Their concerns about violence were not usually expressed through panic or hiding, but through “common sense” lessons about where to travel on the island, how to travel, and when to travel. I listened to these tips carefully and learned how to balance caution with being mindful about challenging certain assumptions about specific groups of people (such as the Ladino threat narrative). This helped me mitigate my own vulnerabilities as I conducted research.



Figure 1.15: Sign posted on a residence in La Colonia. Photo by author.

I realized that gaining access to the community would take patience, caution, and careful attention to these local conceptions of “common sense” regarding safety. Kovats-Bernat (2002, 214) argues for just such an approach for anthropologists working in dangerous field sites, stating:

Rather than guide my fieldwork with hegemonic assumptions about uneven power relationships between ethnographer and informants, I applied a localized ethic-I took stock of the good advice and recommendations of the local population in deciding what conversations (and silences) were important, what information was too costly to life and limb to get to, the amount of exposure to violence considered acceptable, the questions that were dangerous to ask, and the patterns of behavior that were important to follow for the safety and security of myself and those around me.

As a workaround to the security challenges I faced, I continued volunteering with local charities and NGOs, but I also got a job in the tourism industry. The Roatán Marine Park needed someone to work at their small cart at the Carnival cruise ship dock. I took the job – working a couple days a week for five months. I served both as a company ambassador as well as a fundraiser. On a daily basis, I came in contact with hundreds of tourists. I answered a wide range of questions, such as “Where can I go to see turtles?” “How do I get a taxi?” “What’s the best beach on the island?” and a personal favorite, “Where am I?!”.



Figure 1.16: Carnival Cruise Lines' facility in Mahogany Bay, Roatán. The cart where I worked. Photo by author.



Figure 1.17: Typical lunch for employees at cruise ship facility. Rice, beans, plantains, and conch. Photo by author.



Working at the cruise ship facility was a great way to get to know the nitty-gritty details of island tourism since I got to be an active participant in it. When not answering tourists' questions, I was also selling souvenirs such as t-shirts, mugs, and calendars, to raise money for island conservation. Shifts at the cruise ship dock lasted anywhere from 6-12 hours. During my time there, I made friends with and got to know other employees at the facility, including residents of La Colonia.

To travel from my neighborhood to the cruise ship facility, I had to take a taxi approximately 45 minutes (one way). Taxi drivers were typically Ladino migrants, so most days on my way to and from work I would chat with drivers about their lives, both before and after moving to Roatán. This was a non-threatening way for me to conduct interviews, as most taxi drivers seemed to welcome conversation as a way to pass the time while they worked. Due to the sheer numbers of taxi drivers I spoke to, I felt I got a good sampling of stories about push factors leading to migration, as well as insights into the everyday lives and livelihoods of migrants in general.

Eventually, other efforts to make contacts in the neighborhood were also successful. One day I got a call from the director of a charity I had volunteered with. She knew about my research and offered to help me make contacts when she could. Earlier that day, she had received a call from a panicked kindergarten teacher in La Colonia. The school year was over and graduation was the following weekend. Schoolchildren customarily wore special graduation uniforms at the ceremony, which had to be purchased by parents. The teacher was upset because she heard that two of the children's parents couldn't afford to buy the uniforms, so they didn't plan to attend graduation. If they didn't graduate, they would not pass kindergarten and could not start

first grade.

The director of the charity decided she would use some of the organization's funds to buy graduation uniforms for the kids. She was calling to invite me to tag along. I said I would love to go.

Soon after, she and I got a taxi and headed to the town of Coxen Hole where we met up with the teacher and two girls. After a bit of discussion over the correct sizes, the uniforms were bought. As we got ready to leave the store, the teacher asked if we'd like to attend the graduation. We both agreed.

The next weekend, we attended the graduation, where I was able to meet neighborhood parents and other teachers at the school.



Figure 1.18: Picking out graduation uniforms at a local shop. Photo by author.



Figure 1.19: Ladino girls in uniform, ready for kindergarten graduation. Photo by author.

I also volunteered with the Bay Islands Conservation Association (BICA), which helped me gain further access to the community. BICA is housed in Sandy Bay and oversees co-managing the island's marine protected area (along with the Roatán Marine Park). On one occasion, I was invited to tag along while they gave a presentation on climate change to a class of school children in Sandy Bay. After the presentation, the NGO employees, school kids, and I did a project together. Their assignment was to break into groups and walk through La Colonia, looking for and documenting sources of water pollution. This gave me a great opportunity to get to know neighborhood kids and see their unique perspectives on local ecology.





Figure 1.20: Climate change presentation by BICA. Photo by author.

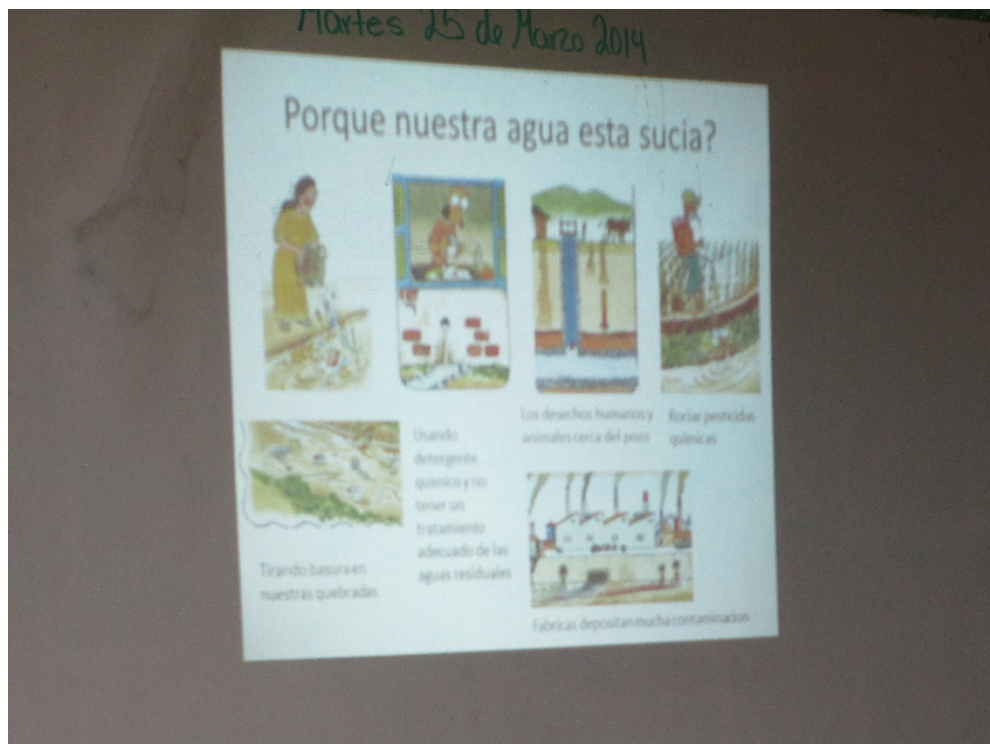


Figure 1.21: Presentation slide: “Why is our water dirty?” Photo by author.



Figure 1.22: Ladino kids sit outside a pulperia (small store). Here they fill out their assignment on sources of water pollution in La Colonia. Photo by author.





Figure 1.23: A young Ladino girl documents sources of water pollution in La Colonia.  
Photo by author.

Another non-profit I worked with was housed in Sandy Bay and mentored area kids. As part of their efforts to provide safe after- school programs, they ran a softball league for island residents. I volunteered to be part of a rotating crew who ran their concession stand (cooking hot dogs and hamburgers and selling beer). Although it might not seem exceptional to an outside observer, the construction of the softball field was a major accomplishment. There are no other outdoor sports venues on the island with lights, nor any public parks at all on Roatán. Lighting and electricity are staggeringly expensive on the island. The charity persuaded the local power company to donate the lights. And a local business owner donated the use of the land. This was one of the only public gathering places on island that didn't cost money where people could go after dark. This was important because it gets dark in Roatán very early, around 5:30 p.m. By the time most people get done with work, they have very few options to be social outside of bars and restaurants (which are often prohibitively expensive). The field was a much-needed space for people to gather in the evenings, and games were quite competitive. Games were held in the evenings, twice a week during the season, providing me with more opportunities to get to know local residents.





Figure 1.24: Softball field in West End, Roatán. Photo by author.

While I had initially planned to collect the bulk of my data through door-to-door randomized surveys of Ladino migrants, meeting informants while working for and volunteering with NGOs and charities gave me better access to this group. These organizations provide many vital services (such as healthcare, education, and recreation) and engage with a large swath of the island population. The events and activities I participated in gave me the opportunity to connect with people in a non-threatening way. I gained a deeper understanding of how broad structural forces shaped everyday forms of uncertainty in daily life on Roatán.

My newly formulated research methodology employed a purposive sampling

strategy. Bernard (2006) argues one way to gain access to hard-to-find or stigmatized groups (such as Ladino migrants in Roatán) is through purposive sampling. A purposive sample is a type of nonprobability sampling (Babbie 1998). It is used when a researcher is purposefully seeking out a specific population, but when a formalized sampling strategy is not the best course of action. Instead, through this strategy the researcher must use their own judgment to be inventive and strategic in gaining access to informants.

I used my employment and volunteer opportunities to meet informants this way, which then helped me use respondent-driven-sampling (snowball sampling) later. This sort of strategy relies on referrals that help a researcher grow their sampling pool (Bernard 2006). By meeting and getting to know Ladino migrants in informal settings, I was able to gain enough trust to be introduced to others in the community with whom I later conducted in-depth semi-formal interviews. This sort of flexibility in my research design was necessary to establish connections with residents of La Colonia. It also allowed me to collect higher quality data, while reducing risk for my informants (who might be participating in illegal activities at home such as cutting down trees) and for myself (by getting to know informants first while associated with other residents and organizations on the island). As added protection for informants, names throughout this dissertation have been changed and key details strategically altered to help obscure identities.

#### Everyday Violence, Personal Precarity, and Silences in My Fieldwork

The emphasis on how people come to grips with life under siege, on the experience, practice, and everydayness of violence, makes attention to fieldwork conditions necessary. The emotional intensity of the events and people studied, the political stakes that surround research on violence, and the haphazard circumstances under which fieldwork is conducted entwine fieldwork and

ethnography. These tensions weave their way through the whole of the anthropological endeavor—coloring the lives and perspectives of the researchers and those they study alike (Nordstrom and Robben 1996).

While precarity is a major theme that emerges from my analysis of the everyday lives of Roatán's residents, it is important to note that I myself experienced forms of personal precarity while conducting research. This uncertainty was shaped by and filtered through the complex, sometimes ambiguous, often mundane, interactions I had as a result of my nationality, class, gender, and role as an anthropologist. Ethnographic fieldwork creates challenges for anthropologists because the boundaries that distinguish personal and work life often disappear. Therefore, the unique field settings in which we conduct our work necessarily shape our experiences with collecting and analyzing data (Markowska-Manista and Pilarska 2017).

The touristic imaginary of Roatán as a tropical paradise is interrupted and tarnished by some uncomfortable realities of daily life on the island. For example, resorts, banks, ATMs, gas stations, and grocery stores are all places likely to have armed guards. While it is common in much of Latin American (and certainly also other places around the world), to use private security guards at places of business, coming eye to eye with a gun while on vacation must take some of the magic out of the experience.

To the outside observer (especially coming from an affluent nation), the prevalence of armed guards (usually young men) at often seemingly innocuous locales can be jarring. Even as an anthropologist who had traveled around Central America and had experienced this before, it was an aspect of culture shock that I found somewhat difficult to get used to while living in Roatán.

I'm not sure if it came from force of habit, or from an attempt to weaken the stifling feeling of militarization over my life, but I could not bring myself to not say "hello" to these armed guards. This was especially true for one particular young man who was a guard I saw frequently at a gas station/convenience store, named Manuel.

For the first few months I lived in Roatán, I rented a small, one-bedroom apartment adjacent to the gas station. I loved the ease of it. I could walk just a short distance and get my morning coffee, pick up something quick for dinner, or easily hop in a taxi to go to work.

I went to the gas station virtually every day while living at this apartment and would frequently see Manuel. He looked to be in his early twenties, was thin, and handsome. Each day as I approached the door to the gas station, I would look his way and say "hola."

In return, he would either stare sternly at me, or occasionally mumble, somewhat begrudgingly, "hola" in return. I could tell I often annoyed him, or at the very least broke a social norm. But I could not help myself.

While it is common protocol for patrons to politely ignore armed guards while going about their business, I found it almost impossible to do this. I think part of my discomfort came from the incongruence between the impersonal nature of guard work (armed, silent, and unflinching), and the familiarity that develops when you see the same person, day after day, sometimes multiple times per day. I learned it is easy to keep a distance (or even be afraid of) an armed guard you do not know. But things become muddled when the person surveilling you seems innocuous and you see them so



frequently. And the day-to-day social relations between those doing surveillance and the people they surveil become even stranger once something intimate like an embarrassing moment is shared.

For example, one day things changed between Manuel and me. He was typically stationed outside at the front door to the store. But occasionally he would patrol the aisles inside if there were a lot of people shopping at any given time. It just so happened on this day that a cruise ship was docked on the island, and a few passengers had made their way to the store. As I looked for the items I had come to buy, I noticed a man and woman, seemingly American and seemingly drunk, giggling in confusion over a particular item. I watched as they approached Manuel, and the man blurted out in English, “how much are these tampons?”

Manuel’s face went red and his normally stoic expression melted into mortification. He didn’t speak English well, and fumbled for an answer. The couple repeating the question to Manuel, getting louder, as nearby shoppers started to take notice.

I was close by, so I quickly walked up to the couple and showed them the price tag on the box.

“Wow, that’s expensive!” the man exclaimed.

I realized they were confused. I explained the price on the box was in lempiras, not dollars, and told them the exchange rate. They were grateful for the information, thanked me, and then stumbled off, giggling toward the counter.

As I turned to walk away, Manuel caught my eye and said “gracias” with a

sheepish smile and a nod of his head. Then, looking at the floor and still very red in the face, he walked off.

After that, Manuel greeted me with an “hola” each time I visited the gas station. It felt like a small victory.

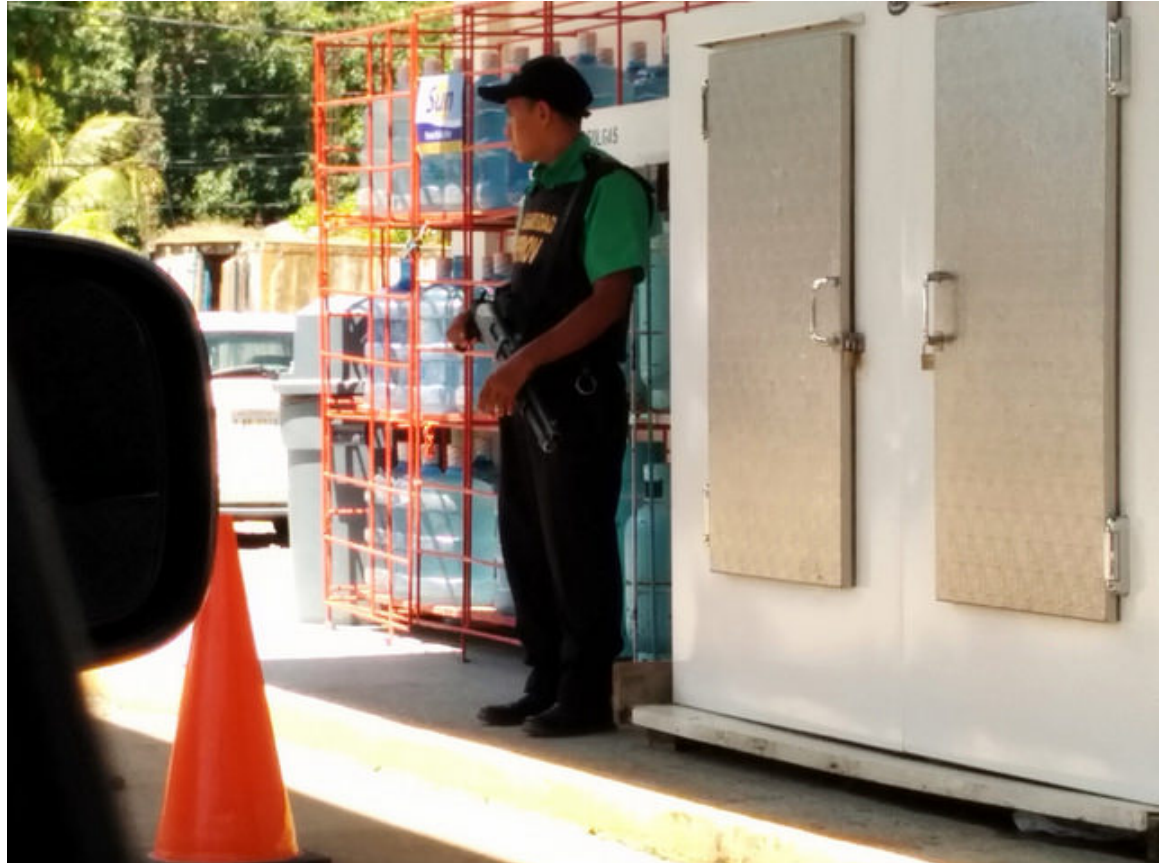


Figure 1.25: An armed guard (not Manuel) outside a gas station in Roatán.

My interactions with Manuel showed that both my gender and nationality could work to my advantage in breaking down social barriers between me and Ladino migrants in Roatán, although in this example, in a somewhat inconsequential way. But my status as a white, female, American did make inroads for me and my research in ways that were far more consequential.

Working at the cruise ship dock created several confusing, yet illuminating, situations about my status on the island. I remember early on while working there I packed up my backpack after a long day of work and set out for home. It was often difficult to get a taxi home because most drivers (who were lined up in a seemingly never-ending line of cars while the ship was there) had left by then (since all passengers were usually back on the ship). If there was a taxi or two hanging around when I left for home, they would often try to charge me exorbitant tourist prices (often around forty dollars) when I knew that the local rate for a ride home was much cheaper (usually just a couple dollars). I would often walk down the long road from the cruise ship facility to the main road, where I could get a taxi that just happened to be passing by (that would give me a cheaper ride home).

In order to do that, I had to walk past the armed guards who were at a security station just outside the facility gates. That day, as I got a bit past the security station, I was startled to hear and see an armed guard yelling and chasing after me. When he caught up to me, he said something in broken English along the lines of “Miss, the boat is back that way! The boat!” and he motioned towards the large ship docked behind us that was about to leave. He clearly thought I was a cruise ship passenger who had lost her way.

After explaining to him I *worked* there and also lived on the island, we both had a good laugh and he let me continue on my way. This scenario happened more than once during my time there, and while fairly innocuous, reminded me that the roles I often occupied in Roatán did not quite match up to the assumptions people made about me based on my looks and status.

While leaving the cruise ship facility often created awkward interactions like this, my arrivals at the cruise ship facility often revealed my privilege. All cruise ship employees were supposed to have security badges. The armed guards would check them at their guard station each morning before access was granted for employees. The day before my first morning of work, I was concerned because I still had not been given a badge. When I asked how I would get into work without it, one Marine Park employee told me, “well . . . they won’t give *you* any problems,” implying that my race and nationality would grant me access.

She was right.

On my first morning, I arrived for work on a scooter and was stopped by security. I tried to explain that I worked for the Marine Park and they had hired me to work at their cart, but I only got half-way through my well-rehearsed explanation when the impatient guard cut me off abruptly and waved me through, despite not having the proper security credentials. Later on, when I arrived by taxi each morning the driver would simply slow down long enough for the armed guard to catch a glimpse of my face and we would be waved through with no problem. In the entire five months I worked there, I was never hassled for not having a security badge.

But my feelings of privilege and protection often disappeared when I left the gates of the cruise ship facility. While my race and nationality seemed to help me gain access to certain people and places in the tourism industry, my status as a woman often left me feeling vulnerable to potential sexual violence and unwanted attention.

For example, for the first few weeks, I drove a scooter I purchased on the island to

and from work. I loved having the freedom of my own transportation. I did not have to fight with taxi drivers over the price, and also did not have to endure the frequent, uncomfortable questions I received as a woman traveling alone about if I was married or had a boyfriend. However, driving conditions did make me a little nervous. There are no stoplights on the island. No observed speed limits. And most cars drive terrifyingly fast around the island's windy, pot-hole-filled roads. To make matters worse, most of the roads on the island do not have sidewalks for pedestrians so people often walk in the roads. Road shoulders are usually overgrown with tropical vegetation, filled with loose gravel, or abruptly end in a steep cliff, making navigation very unforgiving. Meanwhile, Roatán's mountainous terrain creates many blind corners for drivers. Regardless, I was excited to move around the island without depending on a taxi.

But the love for my scooter came to a quick end soon after it started when I got in an accident on my way home from work.

On that day, my journey home started as usual with no problem, until I came around a corner where a large tour bus had inexplicably stopped in the middle of the road. As a result, the small truck in front of me slammed on the breaks and came to an abrupt stop. I quickly realized I had to stop immediately or crash into the bed of the truck. Small scooters do not handle fast stops well, so as I tightly clenched its hand break I lost my balance and felt it spin out from beneath me. I was thrown off, tumbled several times on the road, scraping my arms, legs, and foot on the asphalt. I ended up bruised and a bit bloodied, but overall endured no serious injuries.

These kinds of scooter accidents (and even deaths) are common in Roatán, so many people living on the island have surely been through worse than I. But that did not

stop my body from going into a sort of shock. After I stopped tumbling, I quickly ran off the road (there were more cars coming up behind me that also had to slam on their breaks, and I risked getting run over) and sat on the shoulder while the tour bus driver and man in the truck ahead of me got out of their vehicles to see if I was hurt. They asked if I wanted to go to a hospital, but I declined, choosing instead to call a friend to pick me up. With that, the two men got back in their vehicles and drove off.

As I sat alone on the side of the road, waiting for my friend to pick me and my scooter up with his truck, I was shaking, bleeding, and tears started to trickle down my face.

Just then, a bus of teenage boys drove by. I only noticed because several of them stuck their heads out the bus window and yelled “hey, baby!” in chorus, while another boy pursed his lips and made air kisses at me.

I was incensed.

Not only was I in shock and physically shaking from the crash, but the road rash on my arms and legs was starting to burn fiercely. Now, added to this unpleasant mix of sensations, was the feeling of vulnerability from unwanted sexual attention. This is when my tears went from occasional drips to an uncontrollable stream down my hot, red, face.

I asked myself, “Could they not tell I was injured?” “Or did they not care!?” “What kind of monsters were these boys?”

Now, with distance from the situation, I find it somewhat ironic that a significant portion of this dissertation is dedicated to examining in detail the structural and everyday forms of violence experienced by Honduras’ male youth, yet, I personally often felt

violated by this group due to the unwanted sexual attention they directed at me.

The day after my crash, my whole body was stiff and sore, and I could barely walk. As I hobbled from my apartment down to the nearby gas station, Manuel (the guard) held the door open for me and asked what happened as he pointed to my skinned and partially scabbed legs and arms. His simple act of kindness made me feel a bit better.

It is precisely this sort of messy complexity in status and positionality that ethnographers, and especially female ethnographers must face. In their anthology *An Introspective Approach to Women's Intercultural Fieldwork* editors Markowska-Manista and Pilarska (2017) encourage female researchers to speak up about these incidents, arguing:

It is in female field research . . . that we encounter borderline situations, experiences which are often discounted in publications and concealed from the readers. Frequently, this curtain of silence obscures the motivation behind undertaking research, its accomplishment and experiences which altogether influence the choice of each of the researcher's path of own field explorations. At times, they also determine one's professional life and, to a large degree, private life too.

We encouraged female field researchers to open their notebooks filled with field notes, referring to places, situation, those researched, and the process of investigations, to look back, to reach for academic theories which place their research in niche fields of exploration and weave individual academic narrations (10).

It is my hope here that in telling some stories about the discomfort I felt as a female anthropologist, it will encourage more mainstream discussion over contemporary methods and how to protect oneself in the field. My interactions with Manuel and my scooter crash impacted me personally but were relatively harmless overall. Other encounters I had while conducting fieldwork felt much more serious.

At one point I was able to conduct a lengthy interview with a policeman (discussed in-depth later in this dissertation). However, what I left out of the re-telling of our conversation was the unwanted sexual advances I withstood as a result of our interview. Part-way through our time talking, the policeman made it clear to me that he and his wife (who lived on the mainland) had an open relationship while he was stationed on the island. At first I tried to ignore and brush off this information. But as we were finishing the interview, he told me that I should come to the police station later that night, and we could keep talking.

I cannot be sure, but I took this invitation to be more than just a friendly chat about my research. I politely declined.

After our interview, every time I saw this policeman in town he would approach me and ask why I had not followed up to do another interview with him. Each time, I would have to make up an excuse as to why I could not get together with him or tell him I already had enough information. I had to strike the delicate balance that many women do – not to anger a man in power, while also not being so agreeable that I endangered myself further. I left this information out of my dissertation initially because I did not want to make the interview with the policeman about *me*. I did not want it to seem like I was inviting attention towards myself in my writing.

The policeman was never overtly pushy, and I never felt physically threatened. So, nothing really *happened*. But I now realize that including this example could be useful to other female anthropologists. After my time conducting fieldwork, I see that the use of participant observation, as part of the anthropologist's methodological "tool-kit," is based on the assumption of the anthropologist's safety, security, and relative power



over the situation. I did not feel I had the luxury to assume those things as a woman in my field site. An often-underplayed aspect of doing ethnography is that the researcher must develop intimate relationships with people. Participant observation requires a degree of this sort of intimacy, in order to be accepted into people's daily lives. But while this method is a hallmark of the field of anthropology, the field was also founded mostly by men. As a woman living and doing research in a patriarchal and often violent place, I found certain hazards exist for female anthropologists trying to establish this sort of intimacy.

Before conducting fieldwork, I read literature on violence in Latin America, took classes on power and gender in Latin America, and did copious amounts of reading on the factors creating precarity in the everyday lives of those living in Honduras. Yet all of these things became abstractions once I went to the field and was faced with ambiguous, complex situations that I had to navigate in order to stay safe.

In her in-depth analysis of violence in a shantytown in Brazil, Donna Goldstein (2013) argues that while broad structural forces are often at the root of everyday violence, this violence becomes necessarily locally interpreted. Broad forces often become too abstract to be useful in everyday explanations of how and why marginalized peoples experience violence. She argues, "understanding violence within a specific population requires theorizing violence" but also "learning about the actors who count . . . where this particular kind of violence takes place" (175).

And so, to answer both calls, to first contextualize forms of violence in Latin America through specific actors, and second, to share with other researchers some of the challenges of being a woman conducting fieldwork, I provide these examples of my own

personal precarity in Roatán. While much of this dissertation uses the theoretical framework of mobility (and immobility), I feel it is appropriate to show my own experiences with *moving* through space – including how, where, and with whom I was granted access in my research endeavors.

I did find some beneficial aspects to my positionality (in addition to my unquestioned entrance into the cruise ship facility). Being able to tell people I was an anthropologist could be useful in helping to protect myself – as a way to explain my behavior and lifestyle. Anthropologists often move through space in weird ways (intently watching people, taking notes, asking nosy questions, seemingly lacking purpose in life). Saying you are an anthropologist can help explain these odd behaviors, grant you permission to places you would not normally be allowed, and can even give you a little immunity in taking sides in social and political conflict.

I also found other ways to use being a (relatively) young woman to my advantage. When I would introduce myself to people during fieldwork, I found I was often mistaken for being much younger than I was. At the time of my dissertation research, I was 30-31. However, many people would often guess my age to be around 21. I think this was because I did not have children and was often traveling alone (without a husband).

At times, this was infuriating, as I felt I was not always taken seriously by those I attempted to interview. Part-way through my fieldwork, I decided it would be beneficial to find a research assistant to accompany me on interviews, in part so I would not look so out of place traveling on my own. But I was not sure how to go about choosing an assistant. I talked it over with one of my key informants and friends in Roatán. I told her I was interested in the stories Ladino migrants had to tell about their lives and how they

made a living on the island.

She told me my research sounded like a form of community service and that high school students were required to do a certain amount of volunteer work in their local communities to graduate. My friend ended up recommending her 16-year-old daughter to help with my research, as she had done lots of charity work on the island with her mother and had spent much more time speaking with Ladino migrants than most other Islander girls her age.

I should note that I realized early on that a good way to describe my purpose in Roatán was that I was doing a “school project.” I was worried that I might come across as a journalist if I didn’t specify my purpose (many of whom are being targeted for violence and/or killed in Honduras at alarming rates). As a result, I think my friend connected me to the work of high school students because of my status as a student and also because of how young I was perceived to be.

I was a bit apprehensive to use someone so young as a research assistant at first (especially since a portion of my dissertation focusses on the exploitation of child labor in Honduras). But realizing how I was locally “placed” in Roatán and that I was perceived as a young, female, student, made my choice of research assistant appropriate. Although her mother suggested to me that my research assistant could consider working with me a form of community service, I told her I was uncomfortable not paying her. I ended up compensating her \$25 per interview (interviews often lasted a couple hours). While being a woman made me feel vulnerable in many ways while conducting research, I feel the use of a similarly perceived research assistant helped me gain access to a hard to reach population because we appeared non-threatening.

My advice to other female anthropologists, doing research in places where they fear violence and operate within constellations of power common to patriarchal societies, is to seize the opportunities you *do have* to make inroads for your research. Another way I found to do this (especially early on in my research) was through participation in the expat community.

While my purpose in Roatán differed from many expats, I became integrated into that diverse community not only because we shared similar backgrounds, but because they were also often the heads of charities and organizations I worked and volunteered with. While my time spent with Ladino migrants was often facilitated through community events, work at the cruise ship dock, or through interviews, I engaged in sustained participant observation with the expat community in Roatán. However, I do not talk much about this community in my dissertation. This is for two reasons. First, expats in Roatán have a fairly loud voice already. Ladino migrants do not. Therefore, I feel my research provides a needed service for a marginalized group on the island. Second, much of the information I obtained about crime on the island was through the expat community, which was given to me in confidence, and I do not want to compromise the safety or trust of my informants.

Nordstrom and Robben (1996) argue that violence often produces confusion and disarray. As a result, contestations in understandings of the truth and how events unfold are often transmitted through rumors. Essentially, rumors play an important role in making sense of how, when, and what forms violence takes. The authors argue rumors are often some of the only forms of information available to anthropologists who conduct fieldwork in the midst of violence. Roatán is no different. Roatán is a place filled with

rumors. Much of my understanding of daily life in Roatán started with rumors and then led me to explore topics more deeply. But because much of this information came from unverifiable sources, I feel uncomfortable naming them. Speaking about violence is very political, especially amongst the expat community in Roatán. Their dive shops, restaurants, and hotels are all dependent on tourist arrivals. And tourists will not come to places that are exceedingly violent. Therefore, my descriptions of violence in Roatán take great care to strike a balance between reporting on the realities of everyday life on the island, while not exposing sources or specific events that are highly controversial or could bring harm to my research participants.

### The Bigger Picture: Precarity and Contemporary Capitalism

Throughout my research, precarity was not a word used by my informants, yet the prevalence of the concept – expressed as overlapping, growing forms of environmental and economic instability – emerged constantly in conversations about daily life. There was a palpable sense that things now are markedly different than in the past. This was typically explained to me through stories of unprecedented job insecurity, a dying coral reef, a lack of trust in neighbors, and diminishing marine resources from which to feed families. Similarly, anthropologists conducting research around the world have increasingly observed instances of intersecting economic and environmental unpredictability such as this. In response, *precarity* has become one of the primary anthropological frameworks used to talk about the present (Hébert 2015). Accordingly, in this dissertation I examine precarity as something necessarily experienced through local economic, environmental, and cultural particularities, but also as indicative of wider global patterns stemming from contemporary capitalism.

In the broadest terms, precarity means a lack of predictability about the future. As currently used by anthropologists, it tends to mean the perception of growing, unprecedented forms of unpredictability in daily life. This far-reaching concept encompasses things such as financial, housing, refugee, and environmental crises. Past studies by anthropologists have used precarity to explain seemingly disparate phenomena, such as tsunamis in Japan (Allison 2013), gangs in Honduras (Wolseth 2011), debt in Chile (Han 2012), and fisheries in Alaska (Hérbert 2015). Precarity has permeated anthropological research and writing at a time when the field is debating how anthropologists should examine human life under unparalleled ecological and economic strife.

For example, human activity is causing significant ecological pollution, decreasing the planet's biodiversity, triggering mass extinction, and altering the earth's atmosphere (Stromberg 2013). At the same time, the gap between the ultra-wealthy and world's majority poor is growing (OXFAM International 2017). As humans struggle to adapt their livelihoods under these conditions, anthropologists are challenged to figure out how to frame, research, and discuss complex cultural configurations against backdrops of unprecedented uncertainty and change. *Precarity* has the potential to be a useful theoretical framework to examine these contemporary tensions between fixity and change, yet the concept is in need of a refinement in meaning and application.

There is no concise, easy way to trace the rise of the precarity framework in contemporary anthropology. While its applications have been sprawling, several theorists are working to sharpen its uses. To gain an appreciation of its value, it is helpful to place precarity in its historical and theoretical contexts. In this discussion, I explore

the concept of precarity through four main ways it has been applied to anthropological work. First, the concept has historically emerged from economic and sociological work on the social class, the *precariat*. Second, the concept can be viewed as a broad-scale expansion of the bodies of literature on risk, resiliency, and vulnerability. Third, the concept of precarity addresses anthropological concerns over ethics and methods in the field. And fourth, precarity examines very specific patterns emerging from contemporary global capitalism. I elaborate below.

French theorist Pierre Bourdieu is largely credited with popularizing the concept of precarity through his discussions of the class of people called the *precariat* (Choonara 2011). Neilson and Rossiter (2008) argue the use of the term precarity emerged alongside a political movement in Europe in response to shifting labor conditions, defined as “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker” (Kalleberg 2009, 2). The use of the concept of the *precariat* was meant to highlight specific forms of instability and increased risk for workers, who were viewed as having the potential to spread all over the world through the proliferation of growing instability of global capitalism (Standing 2011). Anthropologists, however, were somewhat slow to incorporate discussions of precarity into our analyses (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). Just when the concept has really taken off in scholarly debates, the political use of the term in Europe has fallen out of favor. While the European political precarity movement has subsided, the concept of precarity has grown in its attractiveness to scholars who have continued to use the concept as applied to a vast array of people, conditions, and places. The widespread use of precarity among anthropologists, as shorthand for unstable working conditions, risks losing any sort of meaningful value



without further elaboration. Neilson and Rossiter (2008) argue the concept of precarity does not need to be abandoned all together by anthropologists, but that its applications should be simultaneously broadened and refined to create a more robust understanding of the concept under current conditions of global capitalism.

Anne Allison's (2013) work on precarity in Japan emphasizes the need for anthropologists to strike a balance between the concept's generalness and specificity, since not all people and places experience the consequences of precarity in the same ways. For example, she argues while employment in Denmark may be precarious (from the point of view of the worker), government safety nets prevent a loss in employment from being detrimental to a person's overall well-being. This differs from other countries around the world that do not provide those safeties for workers. Therefore, a focus on site – and time – specific particularities is imperative in analyzing how the global backdrop of precarity shapes daily life.

A way to understand the timeliness of the precarity framework is offered by Hinkson (2017), who argues the emergence of precarity in anthropological thought coincides with shifts in how the field views place-making. While in the past anthropologists tended to view places as comprised of bounded spatial and social relations, there is an emphasis now on the unbounded and in-flux nature of all places. This has brought to light the multi-scalar forces that shape place, often in unpredictable ways, and highlights the pervasiveness of precarity for nearly all human populations. Therefore, Hinkson argues, while precarity has always been a force shaping place, it has only relatively recently been recognized as such in anthropological inquiry. While this is

a useful starting point, this analysis does not explain how and why contemporary place-making is uniquely unstable.

Adding to this discussion, Robbins (2013) argues that anthropologists are in dire need of addressing key issues in our methodology and theory. He argues place-making is not only shaped by multi-scalar forces, but also by anthropologists themselves. For example, the anthropological role in place-making can be seen in how we differentiate ourselves from our informant “others”. He explains that during the 1980’s, anthropologists moved away from the concept of the “savage slot” but were left to grapple with how to redefine our subjects and ourselves. At this time, the idea of the “savage” had fallen out of favor and did not fit much anthropological research as a result of intensifying globalization. Therefore, the differences between anthropologists and their subjects were not viewed as stark enough. He argues a “suffering slot” emerged to fill this gap, and this new trope emphasized poverty, violence, and marginalization to set anthropologists apart from their informants. However, Robbins points out the problem with the “suffering slot” is that suffering is a universal human experience, and while this framework provides a way for anthropologist to reorient their work to highlight differences between people, it ignores key cultural differences in how that suffering is experienced.

One well-known anthropological work Robbins (2013) highlights to demonstrate his point is *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*, by João Biehl (2013). He describes this work as a sophisticated exploration of broader social ills in Brazil – done through an in-depth case study of suffering. Yet, he argues there is nothing particularly “Brazilian” about the story. He argues work such as this, while offering important

insights, falls short in capturing the unique cultural lenses through which suffering is filtered. In short, he feels the turn in anthropology towards human suffering has glossed over important cultural differences. He argues that today, to address this shortcoming, anthropologist can strengthen studies of suffering by engaging with what he calls an “anthropology of the good.” He argues since conceptions of “the good” must be subjectively conceived (instead of objectively perceived), this provides an opportunity for anthropologists to contextualize suffering in its particular cultural milieus. Tempering examinations of precarity with conceptions of the good therefore addresses not only moral concerns about how we portray informants, but also key methodological and theoretical issues in anthropology.

Building on this sentiment, a growing response to the prevalent use of precarity has been a weariness and rejection of the concept. These anthropologists have also questioned the usefulness of a focus on negativity, instability, and suffering on moral grounds. Instead, they advocate for an increased emphasis on more optimistic aspects of life. For example, Appadurai (2013) argues against the use of precarity and instead for a positive anthropology that will help lay the framework for a better future. He argues that by defining our current moment as precarious, we cement it as cultural fact, without offering any productive path for future action. Instead, he argues, we should focus on ways to improve the current condition through employing frameworks such as aspiration and well-being.

Echoing this sentiment, others such as Fischer (2014) also focus on well-being and a positive anthropology that looks at concepts of justice, fairness, and happiness in a cross-cultural way that finds similarities in the human condition despite stark lived and

material differences (in his case comparing middle-class Germans to poor Guatemalans).

Adding to this chorus are other anthropologists that find theoretical middle ground between optimism and pessimism in framings of the present. For example, in her ethnography entitled *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile*, Han (2012) paints a precarious portrait of daily life in Chile in which people live their lives under the constraints of multiple kinds of debts (moral, social, financial). However, she balances her discussion of crisis with a study of how people *care* for others to mediate widespread violence.

Similarly, in the book *The Will to Improve*, Tania Li (2007) explores narratives of progress that persist despite continued failures of development schemes in Indonesia. She argues the hope of progress provides stability in the midst of precarity. And Wolseth (2011) explores the role of Christianity in mediating gang violence among youth in Honduras. These scholars all walk a fine line between calls for a more positive anthropology while still framing conditions of daily life as precarious.

Hankins (2015, 553) calls for exactly this sort of “productive tension” in his article “The Ends of Anthropology: 2014 in U.S. Sociocultural Anthropology”, arguing:

anthropology is motivated by a moral optimism pointing toward the possibilities of an ethically and politically better life. Equally as fundamental, I argue, is a rigorous skepticism interrogating the shifting conditions that give life to anthropology’s possibility.

Therefore, he advocates for reorienting ourselves towards inquiries that demonstrate tension between optimism in daily life and the backdrops of precarity they

play out against, thus providing valuable theoretical as well as methodical tools for anthropological inquiries of the present. This approach is useful because it highlights cultural and actor-specific interpretations of broad-scale uncertainty. Therefore, a useful way to move beyond the “suffering slot,” and the ease with which it can be invoked through examinations of precarity, is through contextualizing global ecological and economic crises as locally interpreted and mitigated.

In order to understand how economic and ecological precarity stemming from neoliberal development differs today from the past, an analysis of closely related theoretical bodies of literature – vulnerability, risk, and resiliency – is helpful. At a cursory level of analysis, vulnerability (susceptibility to harm, broadly defined) stems from a wearing down of resiliency (the ability to cope with change). And risk is the possibility that a negative outcome might come about from a particular (set of) action(s) (Chibnik 2011). Much scholarly research has focused on the complex decision-making processes that people use to avoid risk, increase their resiliency, and make themselves less vulnerable. These bodies of literature are robust. Sometimes they overlap, but more often than not they are used across diverse fields of study, at different scales of analysis, and address different human problems.

Barrios (2016) argues while the concept of resiliency, in particular, has recently gained popularity as an anthropological field of inquiry, its applications are often based on assumptions about human communities that should be challenged. For example, he argues the concept of resilience is based on the idea that there is some sort of stasis in human communities – or a “pre-shock” state – to which they will eventually return. Anthropological research has demonstrated, to the contrary, that all human groups are

continuously undergoing change and that stasis is not an eventuality. He argues the overemphasis on localized community responses to disasters in anthropological research often obscures the global interconnections that foment the creation of disasters themselves. Instead, he argues, uncertainty in human lives should be viewed as 1) historically shaped, 2) part of broader political-ecological relationships, 3) systemic in nature (not just localized), and 4) framed in ways to give credence to subaltern voices. I argue the precarity framework offers the opportunity to address these shortcomings in vulnerability research through an examination of the tensions between broad-scale patterns of global uncertainty and the localized responses to that uncertainty.

For example, precarity becomes a useful theoretical tool when used not simply as shorthand for uncertainty, but instead use it to highlight *new forms* of uncertainty emerging from an ecologically and economically vulnerable capitalist system.

For example, Anna Tsing is one anthropologist using the concept of precarity to examine both broad forms of global uncertainty while also contextualizing this uncertainty as locally constituted. In her book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Tsing (2015) uses the Japanese delicacy, the matsutake mushroom, to explore how things thrive in the wake of global capitalism. She argues current discussions of precarity cannot be divorced from two failures: the escalating global environmental crisis and the inadequacy of the post-WWII global capitalist development apparatus.

Matsutake mushrooms cannot be cultivated, but instead grow in deforested areas. They often appear after significant acts of ecological destruction (e.g. old-growth logging in the Pacific Northwest), the likes of which are happening all over the world. Tsing



traces the harvesting of these mushrooms amidst growing ecological and economic uncertainty, showing the unlikely connections between diverse people and places that result. The mushroom then serves as a symbolic and material example of why we need to look beyond community-based dichotomies of either disaster or stasis as a result of the global capitalist system for a more complete understanding of contemporary life and how it is shaped by uncertainty.

These two factors combined – a failing global *economy* and a failing global *ecology* – are significant markers that render previous conceptions of vulnerability and resiliency to capitalism (focused on localized communities and their responses) as insufficient in understanding the complex entanglement of forces leading to uncertainty. Tsing (2015, 5) argues:

Only an appreciation of the current precarity as an earthwide condition allows us to notice this – the situation of our world. As long as authoritative analysis requires assumptions of growth, experts don't see the heterogeneity of space and time, even where it is obvious to ordinary participants and observers. Yet theories of heterogeneity are still in their infancy. To appreciate the patchy unpredictability associated without current condition, we need to reopen our imaginations.

The precarity framework is not meant to simply imply there is no stasis in contemporary capitalism, but to emphasize there is a need to look to new and emerging forms of capitalist accumulation through the instability produced through a failing global ecology and economy. For example, Saskia Sassen (2014) argues old explanatory models of poverty and injustice do not adequately explain contemporary uncertainty. A new and important feature of contemporary precarity is the unprecedented number of *expulsions*, or forced removals of people from their lands. Expulsions come about from

concentrations of power amongst complex predatory “formations” as opposed to predatory elites. One of the many examples Sassen gives of this is the recent housing crisis in the U.S. She argues that this crisis stemmed from an increasingly complex use of financial instruments that were used to proliferate subprime mortgages. This situation led to expulsions for millions of Americans from their homes just a few years later.

Essentially, Sassen (2014, 200) argues pinpointing the causes of human uncertainty has become more difficult and complex as multiple factors work in concert and obscure direct relationships. These formations, she asserts, are:

A mix of elites and systemic capacities with finance a key enabler, that push toward acute concentration. Concentration at the top is nothing new. What concerns me is the extreme forms it takes today in more and more domains across a good part of the world.

My application of precarity in this dissertation draws in large part from this perspective. Examples of Sassen’s “formations” can be seen throughout the stories of crisis and instability that emerged from my research. Therefore, to explore the complex sources of and reactions to precarity in Roatán, chapters in this dissertation are organized around four main crises shaping life for Ladino migrants, which in turn foment precarity more broadly.

Chapter two explores the crisis of *representation*. I examine multiple aspects of representation: political, cultural, and physical. This chapter demonstrates how Ladino migration to Roatán is linked to mainland political unrest and Ladino marginalization. I argue Ladinos continue to suffer from a lack of political representation on the island due to their physical and cultural invisibility. This invisibility has been fomented by a

*migrant threat narrative*, which places Ladinos at the forefront of discussions over the tourism industry's sustainability, while simultaneously rendering them somewhat invisible in everyday life. One consequence of the poor political representation of Ladinos in Roatán has been a lack of urban planning in La Colonia and haphazard settlement growth. This has created a situation where houses were constructed in a way that makes environmental engineering of needed infrastructure nearly impossible and presents serious obstacles in the way of mitigating the ecological degradation being caused by the neighborhood.

Chapter three explores the crisis of *mobility*. While the previous chapter laid the groundwork for understanding some of the broad “push” factors shaping Ladino migration, this chapter explores Ladino social and economic mobility in their everyday lives on the island. I investigate how efforts by Roatán's municipal government to make the island a “zero crime community” through increased surveillance makes both poor Islanders as well as Ladino migrants increasingly vulnerable as they engage in complex power negotiations with local law enforcement. This replicates broader patterns in the country's judicial system that disproportionately punishes the majority poor, while allowing wealthier Hondurans to live above the law (Gaouette 2017). Additionally, as a result of the lack of understanding of the role Ladinos play in island tourism and an over-emphasis on their perceived role as criminals, I argue surveillance efforts will actually undermine efforts towards island security, as they impede livelihood efforts and make life less predictable. This chapter uses multiple actors in Roatán's tourism industry to demonstrate the range of immobilities experienced through surveillance efforts on the island.

Chapter four explores the crisis of *land rights*. Land ownership and use are highly political issues in Honduras, linked more broadly to civil rights for the majority poor. The relatively recent growth of the palm oil industry on the Honduran mainland has led to a significant number of violent removals of poor Hondurans from their land, resulting in diminished livelihood options and political unrest. In this chapter, I examine how the political struggle for land rights by mainland Hondurans manifests in unique ways in Roatán by migrant squatters who continue to claim land through traditional methods such as “cleaning” it (removing trees, shrubs, and other vegetation) and making it “productive” (planting crops). This method is at odds with the island’s “tourism free zone” which prioritizes international investment and dictates the use of formal land titles is the only legitimate method for land ownership. Traditional methods for land claiming are not legally recognized in Roatán, yet these strategies often succeed through local power struggles. These land claiming strategies negatively affect conservation efforts on the island and add to the growing ecological crisis, but also exemplify the diffuse, complex nature of land rights politics in Latin America amidst growing instability in everyday life. Overlooking how the politics of land rights on the mainland shape migrant land use in Roatán misses an opportunity for island stakeholders to mitigate ecological damage stemming from settlement growth in the Sandy Bay watershed.

Chapter five explores the crisis of *disappearing childhood*. The perceived loss of childhood in Honduras has become a symbolic and material manifestation of the systemic and structural violence shaping daily life in the country. A loss of childhood makes Honduras’ youth more vulnerable to violence, which can be seen, for example, in a case study of a youth vendor who sells handicrafts on the beaches in Roatán’s tourism industry

to make a living for his family. The need for him to work from a very young age (approximately seven years old) exposed him to multiple forms of structural and personal violence (for example, obligatory gang affiliation, his forced entrée into crime, fist fights to defend his sales territory, and the inability to go to school to break his family's cycle of poverty). I argue, however, that Roatán's tourism industry provides him with a way to carve out an identity and sense of well-being. I examine the ways he copes with everyday violence and crime, how meaning and hope is found under such dire conditions, and how his specific economic choices are made. I argue tourism precarity in Roatán cannot be fully understood without an acknowledgement of the immediately tangible as well as cascading effects that lost childhood and violence have on local and regional instability. Accordingly, disappearing childhood in Honduras is associated with an increase in crime and "anti-social" behavior (such as gang membership) and negatively impacts the confidence of international tourists who fear for their own safety.

When viewed together, the four major crises explored in this dissertation show that the expulsions experienced by Honduran Ladinos, and the subsequent instability of Roatán's tourism industry, are shaped by complex power arrangements that reach far beyond the island's growing Ladino population.

While population growth in La Colonia does play a significant role in ecological destruction of the nearby marine protected area, I argue that focusing too narrowly on Ladino migration as a technical problem (framed as surpassed ecological carrying capacity) misses the other complex factors that have converged to result in widespread Honduran and regional uncertainty.

Reichman (2011) argues one result of contemporary neoliberalism in Honduras is the disintegration of social and economic relationships at the community level. He argues reintegration into communities is, conversely, a significant factor shaping the lives of Hondurans. Much research focuses on reintegration as a phenomenon that happens through Ladino emigration to the U.S. In contrast, I demonstrate that Ladino migration to Roatán is an overlooked, but significant form of social and economic reconfiguration for marginalized Ladinos. But, Ladino social and economic integration in Roatán is challenging to discern, as it comes at a time of unprecedented ecological decline, economic uncertainty, and growing crime.

My research situates precarity found in Roatán's tourism industry within broad anthropological conversations about global uncertainty. I contextualize the situation in Roatán by examining its parallels with broader patterns in global capitalism (increased expulsions) while examining this trend as something that is inextricably local in nature (for example, stemming from the country's long-standing land distribution inequality). I use this analysis to move beyond the methodological as well as theoretical insufficiencies with the "suffering slot" by investigating the ways precarity in Roatán are being filtered through actor- and place- specific cultural lenses to produce meaning. This in-depth examination of the myriad factors shaping island precarity is meant to provide a roadmap for what Appadurai (2013) argues could be an "anthropology of the future . . . that can assist in the victory of a politics of possibility over a politics of probability" (3). Therefore, my goal is that this analysis might contribute to broader solutions to the island's economic and ecological crises.



## Chapter 2: The Crisis of Representation for Honduras' Majority Poor: The Ladino Threat Narrative

*“People come here from the mainland. They go up the mountains. They build their houses. They have nothing. So they cut the trees. There’s no light. No electricity. Pretty soon you see 11 houses and 8 families in a very small area. They have very little chance of working here because there’s no agriculture. So they have to commit crimes. That’s not the type of person we want to live with on this island”.*

– Municipal government official speaking about Ladino migrants at a public meeting on crime and safety in Roatán (February, 2014).

### Introduction

One sunny day, I was getting a ride home from a Ladino taxi driver. After a bit of conversation, I asked him where he lived. “Sandy Bay” he told me. Knowing that mostly (black and white) Islanders live in Sandy Bay, while mostly Ladinos live in the adjacent community called the Sandy Bay Colonia (commonly called *La Colonia*), I continued, “Ahh . . . but where do you live in Sandy Bay?” “Uh. . .the Colonia” he said, with a bit of apprehension. “Oh, ok. But where in the Colonia?” I pressed. There are 4 smaller neighborhoods within the Colonia, so I started to name them. “Colonia Policarpo Galindo? Colonia Belfate?” I offered. Before I could list all four, he interrupted me saying, “You know the different *parts* of the Colonia?! Most people don’t even know *about* the Colonia!. . .I live in Monte Fresco.” “Oh, how nice!” I commented.

Remembering what others I had interviewed from Monte Fresco told me about the area, I asked, “It’s very peaceful there, right?” “Yes, very peaceful” he agreed, with a nod and a smile. As we continued driving, he told me about his life and what it was like working as a taxi driver on the island.

This discussion about the specifics of where Ladinos live in Roatán was not a rare exchange, as I had already had conversations with other Ladino migrants about where they lived on the island that unfolded similarly. Many of those I spoke with were also surprised that I knew details about the Colonia, such as the existence of the four smaller neighborhoods that exist within it. At first, I found this odd since mainland migration is a key topic of daily conversation for island residents, local politicians, and NGOs. But over the course of my research I found that most people know little about the actual daily lives and experiences of migrants – including where and how they live. But this led me to an interesting contradiction in my research. I wondered how it was possible that a community of people, frequently talked about and located in the heart of Roatán’s tourism zone, is largely invisible? And what factors contributed to the obscurity of Ladino lives?

I argue a *Ladino threat narrative* makes this paradoxical position possible. The threat narrative places Ladino population growth at the forefront of discussions over the sustainability of the island’s tourism industry, while simultaneously relegating them to a somewhat invisible role in daily and political life. This is done through framing La Colonia and its residents as a place and people of difference – to be feared. This is a significant attribute of the tourism landscape in Roatán because while much anthropological work on tourism has focused on the power disparities between “hosts” and “guests”, much less has been done to understand how diverse host populations create divides amongst themselves (Little 2004). This chapter addresses this gap through an examination of the ways La Colonia and its residents come to be conceived as *different* through place-making processes shaped by the island’s tourism industry.

To do this, I examine the Ladino threat narrative and compare it to the lived experiences of migrants. I find that while the threat narrative presumes migrants are unable to find work in Roatán (because there is no agricultural employment) and as a result supposes they commit crimes (to survive), these claims are unsupported by my research. Instead, Ladino migrants I spoke to were often the victims of crimes and/or violence perpetrated on the mainland, who fled to the island for a better life. I further found that Ladinos actively participate in the island's tourism industry through hard work and long hours, often by means of impressively inventive forms of entrepreneurship, and provide valuable services to the industry.

I argue the obscurity of Ladino migrant lives in Roatán is symptomatic of a larger pattern of exclusion faced by poor Hondurans in light of shrinking political representation. Since the coup of then-president Manuel Zelaya in 2009, political activists have increasingly been targeted and killed for dissent against natural resource-based development projects as well as over fights for basic human rights. As a result, the Honduran mainland has become a progressively difficult place for poor Ladinos (as well as indigenous groups) to voice their political and livelihood concerns, as they are marginalized and silenced in a landscape of changing political economy. At the same time, Roatán has become a more tenuous place for Ladino migrants as the island's municipal government has proposed an identification program to monitor who enters and exits the island, in hopes of limiting migration and reducing crime. I argue that not only is there a human cost to the lack of Ladino political representation, but also environmental and economic costs. For example, in part due to the lack of awareness of the living conditions in La Colonia as the neighborhood has grown, unmitigated

population growth has created a situation in which sound infrastructure development is not plausible and continued ecological destruction is likely. This poses serious concerns over the long-term viability of the neighborhood as well as mitigating its deleterious impacts on the nearby marine protected area.

## Background

A Ladino threat narrative is not new in Roatán, although it has changed in significant ways over the years. Take, for example, the following excerpts about the Sandy Bay Colonia from anthropologist Carolyn Olsen's book (2006, 862), *Loss of Innocence: An Ethnography of Sandy Bay, Roatán, Bay Islands, Honduras*, based on fieldwork she conducted in the 1980's:

The colonia was the largest Spanish-speaking cluster (or settlement) in the bush, on the south side of the carretera. I often heard the local Creole's mention the area, although no one admitted to having been there. One elder told me, "There are over 200 in the colonia. But many have come and gone 'cause there's no work." A car driver from the Coxen Hole-West End route estimated there were anywhere from four to five hundred mainland immigrants in the colonia. Other Creole people mentioned numbers, always in the hundreds.

Miss Abana, a Creole, explained how so many Spaniards came to the area. "For instance, you might know them, the Spanish town, back down yonder where they call it the colonia, colonia something. Well, one (Islander) he married one Spanish girl. She had a family, then they keep coming out and looking for her and she give them place to stay. And they keep coming saying her and them family and giving them place to stay. That's why you see all them Spanish people up behind there. There's a real town up behind there (referring to the colonia). Lone Spaniards tracked in from those places down yonder. I don't know what part of the coast it is."

Mr. John, also Creole, commented, "I must say, it was about five years ago only Creole people in this area with the exception of a few Spanish people that was living here before. You can't count the population now 'cause the Spaniards now come in every day on every plane that come somebody, and every boat that come in some people."

It surprised me that the colonia could be so large. I had imagined a much lower population based on my observations along the coconut walk and on public transport. I was taking a census and making a map of Upper Sandy Bay at the time, so a trip to the Colonia was imminent. One afternoon I gathered my blank census forms and map draft and headed to the colonia.

. . . I was amazed. The colonia, as defined by the Spanish-speakers, only had eight houses. There were no signs of other buildings. A path in the valley ran back further into the bush. But no one lived back there; it was the way to their orchards, animals and wood. The alleged hundreds of colonia residents turned out to be thirty-five, with one woman ready to give birth any time.

Fast-forward thirty years, and the rumors of unremitting mainland migration and fear of a Ladino threat persists. At a public municipal meeting held in February 2014 addressing crime and safety in Roatán (discussed in more detail in the next chapter), Ladino migrants were a key topic of concern. The mayor introduced a three-point plan to make Roatán a “zero crime community,” which included: first, control of people entering and exiting the island; second, the implementation of security cameras in strategic places around the island; and third, twenty-four hour patrols of the main road by law enforcement. This chapter addresses the first point of the plan in particular, while the next chapter focuses on the latter two points. While the plan does not mention whose movements would be controlled on the island specifically, statements made at the security meeting to a mostly expat crowd suggested that limiting Ladino migrants (as opposed to those from the U.S., Canada, or Europe) was desired. During the meeting, a local official from the municipal government described the lives of Ladino migrants on Roatán as he imagines them:

People come here from the mainland. They go up the mountains. They build their houses. They have nothing. So they cut the trees. There’s no light. No electricity. Pretty soon you see eleven houses and eight families in a very small area. They have very little chance of working here because there’s no agriculture.

So they *have* to commit crimes. That's not the type of person we want to live with on this island.

The Ladino threat narrative of the past exaggerated the population and presence of Ladinos in Roatán, while demonstrating that few on the island had actually viewed the living conditions of migrants themselves. What is distinct about the contemporary threat narrative is that Ladinos are framed in terms of the role they play in impeding the success of the island's tourism industry. They are presumed to be criminals, unable to integrate into the island's tourism industry as a result of their assumed ties to agricultural work. And, in a brazen statement by the municipal government, they are portrayed as “not the type of person” that is wanted on the island. I argue these feelings of prejudice against migrants and the continued presumption of their threat manifests in tangible ways through a spatial pattern of physical, political, and social exclusion of La Colonia.

Williams and Lew (2014) argue that spatial patterns such as these are a key topic in the critical investigation of tourism development because “tourism is an intensely geographic phenomenon” (25). While there is a general consensus in anthropology that place has not disappeared in light of globalization, the challenge that remains is to illuminate how and why specific places take on import in the midst of global flows (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). One way to understand these flows is through an examination of mobility. Analyzing patterns of mobility is a way to illuminate how various actors in tourism industries differ in their abilities to access and exert power (Lyon and Wells 2012). In this chapter, I focus broadly on migrant mobility regarding their ability to freely enter and exit Roatán (if the identification program is implemented). This illustrates how the Ladino threat narrative in Roatán works to limit migrant

movements. In the next chapter I examine the concept of mobility more closely to focus on the more subtle forms of power negotiations on the island.

Social processes can be used to exert power, which turn spaces into places of meaning (Williams and Lew 2014). Harvey and Braun (1996) argue that such social processes can be viewed through the lens of political-economics, and that places take on meaning in response to changes in production and consumption. I argue that while much of the political invisibility experienced by poor Ladinos on the Honduran mainland stems from their exclusion from ongoing development projects (such as hydroelectric dams and palm oil expansion), Ladino invisibility on Roatán is closely tied to ideas about who is desirable in the island's tourism landscape and how Roatán, as a place of specific meaning, is constructed to be experienced through the tourist gaze.

The concept of the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990) is a foundational work in understanding the role of place in tourism analyses. The tourist gaze refers to the ways tourists “consume” places through sights and sounds, bringing to light how tourist destinations are fabricated in a way to appease this gaze. Urry argues tourists seek out places that are different (or extraordinary) from their everyday (ordinary) lives, and therefore tourist destinations must be careful to maintain their distinctness to keep their appeal. Similarly, Williams and Lew (2014) argue “Many forms of tourism are firmly grounded in a distinct sense of place, which differentiates them and without which much of the rationale for modern travel would be undermined” (2014, 152).

Critics of Urry's work have pointed out that while the concept of the tourist gaze lays a foundation for critically examining tourism spaces as constructed places, it needs further elaboration. For example, his emphasis on the “gaze” tends to downplay the



active ways tourists participate in and shape tourism industries. Additionally, “ordinary” and “extraordinary” descriptors of life are relative terms. With increasing global connectedness and ease of travel, the boundaries between tourist activities and everyday social and cultural practices are blurred (Williams and Lew 2014). In order to keep these distinctions in place, some tourist destinations go to great lengths.

For example, in his book, *The Devil Behind the Mirror: Globalization and Politics in the Dominican Republic*, Steven Gregory (2014) explores the various ways social processes associated with the tourism industry in the Dominican Republic shape place. Gregory argues that a sharp distinction between ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’ lies at the heart of spatial regulations in tourism industries. Tensions arise, however, when Dominicans do not fit the idealized view tourists hold of them, for example, as quaint and untouched by globalization. Gregory notes that as a result, the tourism industry enacted several spatial regulations to reinforce the binary of ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’.

One way they did this was through requiring licenses for vendors, which many Dominicans could not obtain due to lack of proper paperwork or money. Because the tourism police often targeted Dominicans for random license checks (which led to fines or arrests), most of these vendors moved away from the most popular tourist beach to a different beach with few tourists and little economic opportunity. Gregory (2014) argues practices such as these that act to regulate spatial movements result in “weak claims to citizenship” for some individuals living and working in tourism host communities, as their racial, gender or class identities prevented their inclusion in certain places.

I argue Ladino migrants in Roatán similarly face the threat of weak claims to citizenship on the island due to the threat narrative and the possibility of an identification

program that would limit their travel to and from the island. My perspective is informed by the research of anthropologist Leo Chavez (2013), whose work on Latino migration in the U.S. examines the ways migrant threat narratives become powerful tools for shaping migrant lives. In his analysis, the U.S. Latino threat narrative perpetuates the notion that Mexicans are an invading force meant to destroy the American way of life. He rigorously examines this threat narrative against the lived experiences of migrants and finds there is little credibility to common perceptions (e.g. high Latina fertility, a reluctance to learn English) of migrant lives. Nonetheless, the threat narrative remains a powerful tool through which ideas about citizenship and belonging are formed, which in turn shape public policy. Similarly, the municipal government of Roatán's views on migration (that it adds to crime, ecological decline, and general instability) and its attempts to implement an identification program on the island to curb Ladino migration is an example of such a technique to control both the island's population as well as send a message about who is a desirable citizen in the tourism landscape.

#### Neighborhood Growth, Layout, and Location

To understand how mainland migration has become a key issue on the island, yet one that remains poorly understood, the neighborhood's population growth, as well as distinctive layout and location, are important starting points. Sandy Bay has been an established Islander community since at least the 1830's (Olsen 2006). It sprawls along the northwest coast of Roatán and has historically been home to black and white English speakers. One of the island's most well-known resorts (including scuba center, hotel, restaurants, a dolphin show, and marine research laboratory) is housed in Sandy Bay. Mostly due to the notoriety of this resort, Sandy Bay marks the start of the tourism zone

on the west end of the island (as well as the start of the Sandy Bay – West End Marine Reserve).

Ladinos started settling in the Sandy Bay Colonia (across the main road from Sandy Bay) as early as the 1960's, although as Olsen (2006) notes, the population was only around 35 people by the 1980's. From the start, there has been little integration between Sandy Bay and the Sandy Bay Colonia, as cultural and linguistic barriers created distance between the two neighborhoods. The migrant neighborhood goes by a few names, which are all understood locally to be the same place: "the Colonia", "the Sandy Bay Colonia" or "La Colonia." This neighborhood has grown considerably since the 1960's and is now comprised of four smaller sections: Colonia Policarpo Galindo, Colonia Belfate, Colonia Bella Vista, and Colonia Monte Fresco. The term "the Colonia" refers to the entirety of these four communities and is often used as a catchall for the area unless the speaker needs to refer to a specific location within the Colonia. Today, as in the past, the neighborhood is almost exclusively a Spanish-speaking Ladino community.

The last official population count of the Colonia was done around 2005 by USAID, which estimated the combined total to be around 2,000 residents (USAID Report 2006). But this figure only included three sections of the neighborhood, as Colonia Bella Vista was not counted (as it was likely not yet in existence) when the survey was conducted. It is reasonable to assume the population has continued to grow at a significant rate since 2005 (based on the addition of a new neighborhood as well as evidence from satellite images and from firsthand accounts from people who live there).

It is difficult to obtain exact numbers in part because population measures are done infrequently, but also because population measures are notoriously inaccurate in

Roatán. For example, during the 2001 census, the national government employed monolingual mainlanders to survey the island. These Spanish-speaking mainlanders could not adequately communicate with the English-speaking Islander population. Additionally, surveyors drastically undercounted Roatán's Spanish-speaking population due to their lack of familiarity with migrant neighborhoods on the island (*Bay Islands Voice* 2013). For example, according to reports by the local media, surveyors didn't have the language skills to clarify with neighborhood residents how many people lived at a given home and tended to underestimate how many individuals were living there (*Bay Islands Voice* 2014). Around 2013, a new census was conducted that attempted to address previous sampling errors. This did not provide population numbers by neighborhood but did estimate the island's overall population at around 109,000. This figure was up nearly four-fold from the 2001 estimate of 25,000 total island residents (*Bay Islands Voice* 2014). However, from speaking with residents, I found many people feel that this number is too low as well, as it was largely based on estimates of customers of the local power company, which is also presumed to underestimate how many people lived within a given household. This method also overlooked the numerous people on Roatán who live without electricity (many of whom are migrants).

Another factor that contributes to the Colonia's invisibility is the direction and location of the neighborhood's growth. For example, traditionally, communities on the island have developed along coastlines, resulting in settlements that are long and narrow. Historic communities developed before most roads were established on the island, so it made sense that people would settle along the coastlines and use boats to move from place to place. Since most Islanders historically worked in commercial and/or

subsistence fishing, this also provided easy access to livelihood activities. Below is a photo of an Islander community on the east end of the island that demonstrates this settlement pattern well.



Figure 2.1: Traditional, stilted, coastal Islander homes on the east end of Roatán. Photo by author.



Figure 2.2: Dock of a traditional Islander home. Many traditional Islander homes are built to include docks such as this for easy access to fishing. Photo by author.

Settlement growth inland had also been limited in Roatán due to the fact that the island itself is a narrow strip of land with mountains running down the center. Ladino migrants have tended not to follow historic settlement trends on the island and instead have built their communities in the less desirable, steep, densely vegetated tropical valleys and mountains lining the center of the island. Most migrants do not have much experience with fishing, and this allows some to practice small-scale agriculture as they did on the mainland before migrating. Typical Ladino settlement style in Roatán can be seen in the pictures below.





Figure 2.3: View of the Sandy Bay Colonia from Colonia Bella Vista. Photo by author.



Figure 2.4: Typical construction in the Sandy Bay Colonia. Houses are inland, on steep slopes, and not on stilts. Photo by author.

There is one primary road linking the west and east ends of the island. The road follows the northwest coastline for part of the distance, then crosses the narrow width of



the island to pick up the coastline again and runs the length of the island to the southeast end. In the map below, provided by one of the cruise ship ports, the main road is drawn in red.



Figure 2.5: Island main road (in red). Map provided by Town Center, one of the island's cruise ship ports (Cruisportwiki.com 2017).

The road passes through the major population centers on the island, making coastal communities easily accessible. While the locations of coastal communities are easy to identify (as they exist in a mostly linear fashion along the coastlines), it can be difficult and confusing to explain where the *Colonia is*. While older communities can be identified as either existing before or after major landmarks on the main road, the *Colonia* is different. Instead of developing along the coastline with the whole community being easily accessible from the main road, its only entrance intersects with the main road, then sprawls up the mountain, perpendicular to the ocean. So, unlike other communities, it is neither easily visible nor readily accessible. And while the entrance to the neighborhood

starts along the stretch of main road where Sandy Bay lies, the bulk of the neighborhood is a considerable distance up the mountainside away from the entrance. Because of these complexities, the Colonia is considered to be located both *in* Sandy Bay and *not in* Sandy Bay depending on the spatial scale employed to describe it. While driving along the main road it is true that it exists along the portion where Sandy Bay is located. Yet island residents consider Sandy Bay and the Sandy Bay Colonia very different places. This explains why the taxi driver in the opening vignette first told me he lived in Sandy Bay, then when pressed specified the Colonia, then when pressed even more gave his specific neighborhood within the Colonia.



Figure 2.6: The road leading into the Sandy Bay Colonia. Shown here intersecting the main road. Note that the neighborhood is unmarked and virtually none of its thousands of residents are visible from the main road. From *Bay Islands Voice* (2014).

While travelling on the main road, Sandy Bay takes around ten minutes by car to pass through. It is a long, narrow community. But the entrance to the Colonia only takes

a second to fly by in a taxi. One can only access the neighborhood (and subsequently the four small neighborhoods existing within it) from this single road, which then branches off into more roads that enter into specific communities. Therefore, most of the community is hidden from those traveling on the main road, so many non-Ladino island residents and visitors are either unaware of its existence or have heard rumors about it and avoid going into the neighborhood.

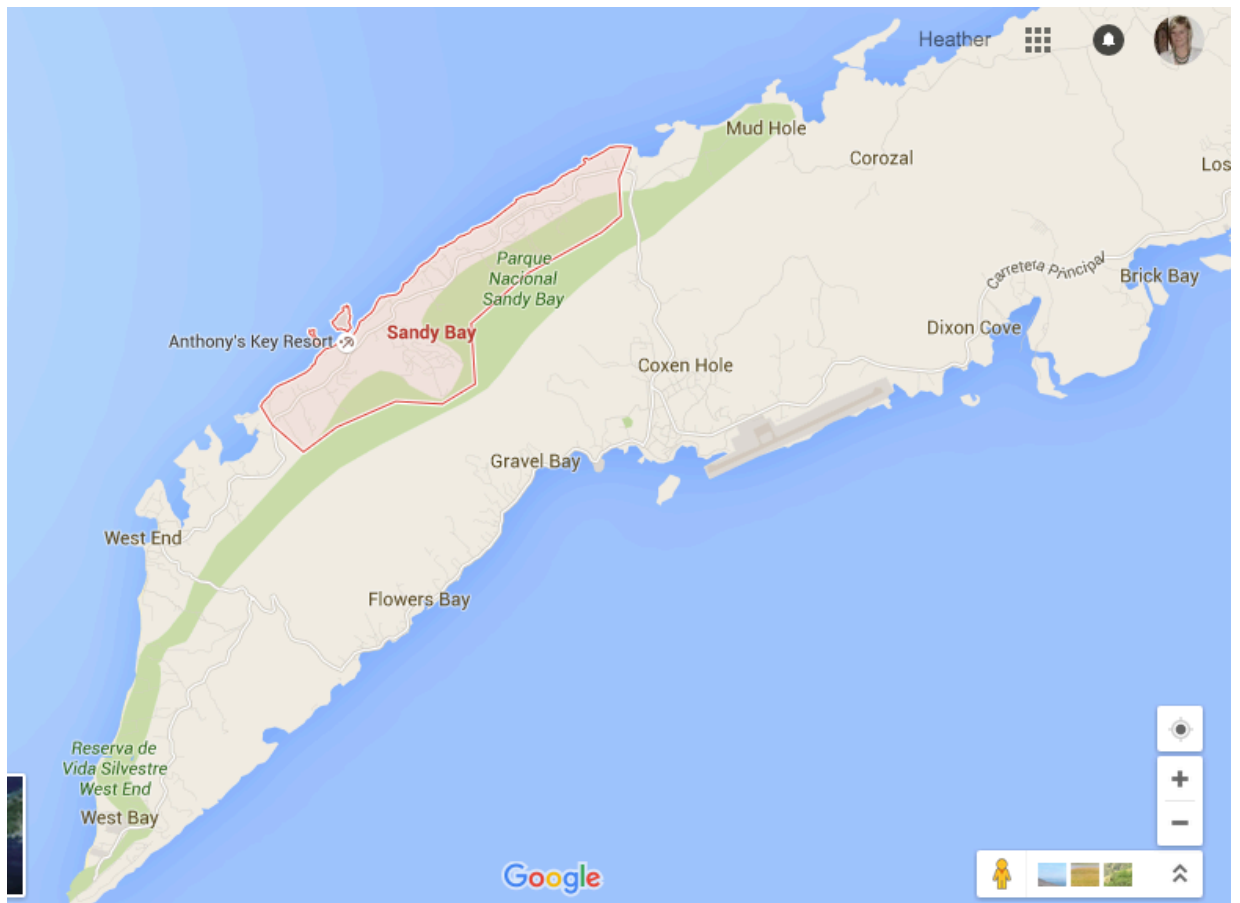


Figure 2.7: Map of Sandy Bay. The area encircled in red is considered Sandy Bay. The historic section of Sandy Bay is located along the coastline. The bulging area pointing towards the southeast is the Sandy Bay Colonia. Google Map of Sandy Bay (2015).

Differences in settlement orientations can be seen on the map above. The historic community of Sandy Bay lies along the coastline while the Colonia is the perpendicular

clearing across the road from Anthony's Key Resort. The image below shows two satellite pictures displaying population growth in the Sandy Bay Colonia from 2002 – 2005 (when the population boom really exploded). Notice the dramatic land clearing and population growth that can be seen in the area in the 2005 photo. In subsequent years, the population has continued to grow, although there are not reliable population numbers.

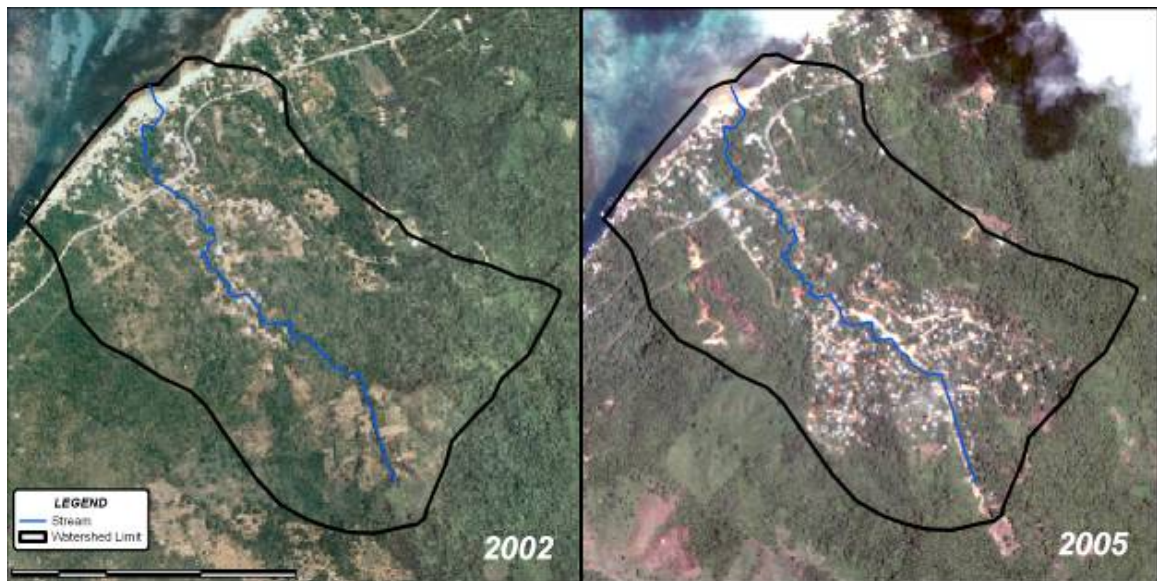


Figure 2.8: Satellite images of Sandy Bay. Images show the population growth in the Sandy Bay watershed region from 2002 – 2005. Sandy Bay is located along the coastline and shows modest change, while the Sandy Bay Colonia is the large population cluster that popped up very rapidly by 2005, shown in the bottom half of the black rectangle in the 2005 photo. From USAID Report (2006, 30).

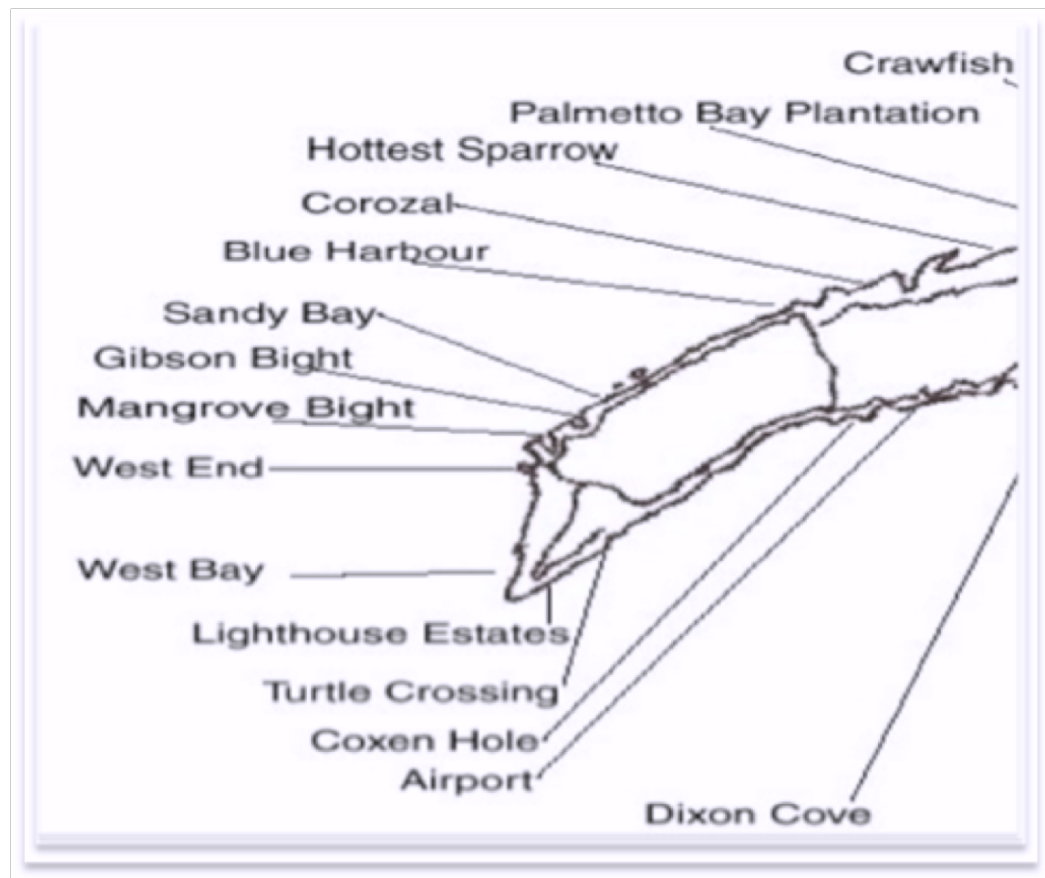


Figure 2.9: Neighborhood map of Roatán. From <http://Roatánrealestate.com/map.htm>

Notice that despite satellite images showing settlement growth, along with local perceptions of La Colonia being a distinct neighborhood on the island, a very detailed real estate map showing the neighborhoods of the west end of Roatán only lists Sandy Bay, with no mention of La Colonia. Similarly, a map provided by a cruise ship port in Roatán details the west end of Roatán, yet makes no mention of La Colonia.





Figure 2.10: Carnival Cruise Map. From [www.carnival.com](http://www.carnival.com)

### A Place of Difference

There are many subtle *and* not-so-subtle ways that La Colonia is marked as a place of difference in Roatán. In addition to how the physical layout of the neighborhood contributes to its invisibility, fear plays a big role in preventing island residents from getting to know the neighborhood, as illustrated in the following anecdote. One day after finishing an interview towards the top of one of the Colonia's mountains, my research assistant Emily stopped to take a selfie with her cell phone. As she did this, she turned and said to me, "My mom is going to be so jealous I came all the way up here!"

“Your mom has never been this far into the Colonia?” I asked, surprised. I had been to the Colonia several times with her mother to deliver donated school supplies to schoolchildren. “No, she’s never been *this* far!” Emily told me.

The home we visited that day did take a lot of work to reach. It was not accessible by car, and could only be accessed by four-wheeler, motorcycle, or walking quite a distance. To get there that day, we took a taxi approximately twenty-five minutes up the steep hills of the neighborhood, got dropped off where the pavement ended, and continued to hike another twenty-five minutes until we reached the home where our interview took place. But beyond the logistical difficulties with accessing parts of the Colonia, Emily, who grew up just a five-minute drive away from the entrance to the neighborhood, told me that her mother forbade her from entering any part of the neighborhood when she was growing up.

“You know, I was only allowed to start coming into the Colonia this year. My mom wouldn’t let me come in here before that. It’s too dangerous,” she told me. At the age of 16 she was finally able to go into the neighborhood. The selfie she took was a source of bragging rights, showing how tough she was for making it to a part of the neighborhood few people visit. Whether or not the Colonia is as dangerous as it is rumored to be, the *perception* of danger is very real. And especially to Islanders, the Colonia is thought of simply as a place that they should not go.

For example, taxi pricing demonstrates another way that the neighborhood is socially constructed as a place that is simultaneously feared, yet invisible. One day I was discussing taxi prices with an Islander taxi driver named Homer. Prices around the island are set by the taxi association and published so all residents know what transportation

costs are. However, the Colonia posed challenges to the fixed price model, as it does not appear as a distinct place on the pricing list. Instead, the list simply listed Sandy Bay as a destination, even though taxi drivers perceived the Sandy Bay Colonia to be a distinct destination. This caused much confusion for me as I did my research. Getting a ride from West End (where I lived) to Sandy Bay only cost a couple dollars. I found out, however, that getting from West End to the Colonia was much more difficult, as pricing norms broke down. While Sandy Bay is a long community, taxi drivers will charge the same price if you get dropped off at the start of the community or the end of the community. But when I would ask to be taken into the Colonia, many drivers would either refuse or say that the price would be raised by several dollars. Sometimes I paid up to \$25 to convince a local taxi to take me into the neighborhood (especially if I was travelling far up the mountain). The interesting thing was, it was conceivable that I would travel a shorter distance overall from West End into the Colonia, than from West End to the far end of Sandy Bay, yet I would be charged more.

Homer agreed that this was indeed an inconsistency in the pricing model. He explained that part of the reason for the increased fare was that the paved roads only last so long in the neighborhood, and bumpy dirt roads were very hard on taxis. But their reluctance to enter the neighborhood also stemmed from the perceived danger and discomfort many native Islanders felt going into a Ladino community. After patiently enduring my continual line of questioning about why pricing models left out the Colonia and taxi drivers avoided going there, he summed up his feelings by simply explaining with a shrug of his shoulders, “We Roatánians don’t like going into the Colonia.”



Others used the perception of the neighborhood as a poor and dangerous place to their advantage. For example, one key participant in my research who was a well-paid government employee told me she could have lived in a much “nicer” part of the island. But she chose to live near the Colonia because rent was so cheap. She lived in an apartment just next to the entrance of the neighborhood and her place could be accessed from the main road. Yet she lived on the side of the main road opposite of Sandy Bay. She did not quite live in the Colonia, but did not quite live in Sandy Bay either. Being aware of her upper middle class standing, she explained to me that if she was in a taxi on her way home from work and was alone or with people she did not know, she felt comfortable telling the taxi driver to take her to the entrance of the Colonia. Many migrants get dropped off at the base of the neighborhood and walk home to avoid being charged extra for entering the neighborhood. She found that if a taxi driver thought she lived in the Colonia they might assume she was poor and give her a cheaper rate. She could then easily walk to her apartment from the base of the neighborhood, and the taxi driver would never be the wiser that she did not really live there.

But, if she was in the car with someone like a friend or coworker, she was too embarrassed to say she lives in the Colonia. Instead she would tell the taxi driver she lived in Sandy Bay, because, as she put it, the Colonia is considered “not a nice place to live” on the island. But the absurdly fascinating thing is that she would literally get dropped off at the exact same spot – the entrance of the Colonia. She would simply tell the taxi driver she was going to Sandy Bay and when the taxi neared the entrance to the Colonia she would just ask him to pull over and let her out. Blatantly asking to go to the entrance of the Colonia could have been cheaper but would have been embarrassing,

while asking to go to Sandy Bay sounded classier but might have cost her a little more. Either way, she got dropped off in the exact same spot.

It is important to note that while taxi prices are publicly published and there was generally little discussion over the costs of travelling from one neighborhood to another for island residents, there was still some room to negotiate fares. I witnessed on several occasions poor migrants handing a lesser amount than the published fare to a taxi driver. Often the taxi driver would take pity on them and accept the lower fare without comment. I also witnessed taxi drivers purposefully inflating rates (for Americans like me or for wealthier Hondurans) in hopes that riders would not know published rates and pay more. It was this flexibility that the government employee was taking advantage of in her decision to ask to be dropped off in Sandy Bay or at the Colonia, depending on her circumstance.

The neighborhood is further marked by class differences in language. One night I was having dinner with a marine biologist who works on the island. He is a Ladino migrant to the island, but also a middle-upper class Honduran who has a university degree. Through the course of conversation, he asked how well I could communicate with migrants living in the Colonia. I admitted that despite spending countless hours in language schools and in university classes studying Spanish, I often had to ask people to slow down or repeat what they had said before I could understand. As I was explaining this, he nodded in agreement, saying that even he (a native-Spanish speaking Honduran) had trouble understanding his gardener, who was a Ladino migrant from the mainland who lived in La Colonia. There was such a marked difference in speech and class between the two men that it was difficult for them to understand each other.

The biologist was involved with an adult education program on the island that taught students about marine ecology. Classes were held at a school in Sandy Bay, where both migrants and native Islanders attended. As I explained what I had been finding in my research, he told me that he too noticed an obvious divide between those living in Sandy Bay and those living in the Colonia. He taught two classes, held at different times of day, which astoundingly self-segregated into an Islander and a Ladino class. One day, he overheard an Islander in casual conversation with friends say that he would rather live in a shack in Sandy Bay than a new house in La Colonia. The others agreed. Part of this attitude stemmed from the perceived dangers of the neighborhood. Part came from a general aversion towards integrating Ladino and native Islander communities on the island. But it also reflected newer feelings of resentment towards the Colonia over housing and infrastructure improvements provided by an array of actors.

For example, in recent years, the neighborhood has received considerable attention from local politicians (looking to secure votes), NGOs (trying to improve the ecology of the nearby marine protected area) and local charities (trying to improve water access and increase school supplies for the poor). This has resulted in parts of the neighborhood having more consistent water access and better roads than some older Islander neighborhoods, such as Sandy Bay. And there now seems to be considerable resentment about the attention the neighborhood has received. One day early on in my research I was chatting with an expat co-leader of a local charity. I asked about the work he had done in the Colonia distributing school shoes and supplies to kids, as well as his future plans working there. “You know,” he said to me with a hint of contempt, “there are plenty of people on the east end of this island getting no help from anyone. They

have no shoes. No school supplies. No help from the government. And nobody is doing anything about it. Those living in the Colonia have become. . .the darling poor.”

The eastern end of Roatán is generally less developed in terms of tourism and infrastructure than the western end of the island. As a result of La Colonia’s proximity to the main tourist areas on the western part of the island, the poverty in this area seems to be given greater attention than the poverty on the more remote, east end of Roatán. Even the local newspaper ran a story about attention given to the living conditions in the neighborhood, exposing the fact that the paving of new roads was rumored to be implemented in exchange for votes leading up to an election. The following photo is from an October 2013 *Bay Islands Voice* article entitled “All Roads Lead To. . .?: Plethora of Pavement Being Laid in Lead-up to Elections.” The caption on the picture reads, “A man totes a watermelon up the freshly paved spur leading to Colonia Policarpo Galindo” (Armstrong 2013).



Figure 2.11: Newly paved road in La Colonia. From Armstrong (2013).

Feelings of disdain for Ladino migrants can be found not just among island residents, but also among sustainable development “experts”. While the migrant threat narrative paints La Colonia as a place of danger and difference, it has also created a situation where much of the population growth has occurred without thoughtful planning from local officials. The lack of infrastructure planning has had serious ramifications for the overall ecological sustainability of the neighborhood. In an interview I conducted with an environmental engineer living and running a business on the island, I was told the best ecological event that could happen to the neighborhood would be “if a fire wiped the whole thing out.”

The face I made in response to this statement was of shock (which he seemed to enjoy). He continued by explaining his statements in the most technical terms possible.

He said that due to the mountainous terrain of the neighborhood and densely packed homes, it would be impossible to lay pipes at the correct slope to implement a widespread sewage containment system. Many residents currently have their own septic tanks that collect sewage, but because they do not have the money to pump their tanks, they drill holes in the bottoms so that sewage slowly leaks out. The result has been that this untreated sewage enters the Sandy Bay watershed and ends up in the marine protected area below. Similarly, he told me that water and electric infrastructure development were also challenging due to the lack of planning as the neighborhood grew. And, after some thought, he switched from his very technical description of the problems with the neighborhood to a more personal opinion of the migrant community. Leaning back in his chair, he looked at me squarely and said, “You know what really bothers me about the neighborhood? No one plants flowers there. That’s how you know they don’t really care about the place.” Ironically, he placed the blame for the poor infrastructure in the neighborhood on residents themselves, not on the local government for overlooking the inadequate living standards migrants withstood. The poor infrastructure represented, in his mind, a material marker of the lack of care he thought migrants expressed for their local environment.

Despite the infrastructural impossibilities, the neighborhood continues to receive ad hoc (not systemic or well-planned) help in raising living standards from local charities and the local government. One neighborhood resident told me she was thrilled with the recent population growth in La Colonia because the local government is “finally paying attention to them (migrants)”. And the fact that some migrants’ lives are getting more comfortable doesn’t please many native Islanders who want them to go back “home”.

For example, one day when I was explaining my research to a middle-aged native Islander woman, she quipped, “Why would you want to study *them* (Ladino migrants)? I know. . .can you figure out a way to get them to all go back home?!”, further demonstrating the feeling that migrants do not really belong on the island. I wondered though, how migrants felt about the situation. Did they consider themselves merely visitors to Rotan? Or was the island now home? And how did their lived experiences compare with the threat narrative that portrayed them as criminal invaders – unemployable and unwilling to integrate into the tourism industry?

Karen

Karen is a Ladino migrant whose life story helps illuminate who migrants are and why they choose to move to Roatán. She moved to the island from the Honduran mainland eighteen years ago. On the mainland, she and her husband had lived and worked for her husband’s father. She told me back then everyone had the same job harvesting corn and beans. People were paid according to how much they picked. But there was no way anyone could survive on farm wages alone. To make ends meet, they raised livestock and sold eggs. Over time, they still could not make enough money to support themselves and their growing family. To add to their desperation, one day her father-in-law decided to sell his business and they no longer had a job or place to live. They did not know what to do but had heard rumors that Roatán had good paying jobs.

While they earned a meager five Lempiras a day on the mainland, they could earn thirty Lempiras a day in Roatán (by today’s exchange rate that would be the difference between \$.20 and \$1.27 USD per day. A day’s work on the mainland pays about \$3.50 while Roatán is closer to \$8 USD). They could not afford for both of them to move at the

same time, so her husband migrated to Roatán first to find a job before she would join him. However, they did not realize how hard it would be for her husband to find a job without knowing anyone on the island. Plus, he had only gone to school through the sixth grade and did not have many marketable skills.

In spite of this, he worked hard to make friends and eventually got a job as a groundskeeper at a dive resort and hotel. After a couple months he saved enough money to bring Karen to the island. Soon after, Karen found work and the couple started making payments towards buying a piece of property in Colonia Belfate. Now, almost two decades later, they have nearly paid off their land, but still have a few more years worth of payments on their house. Six days a week Karen works as a housekeeper for a hotel, then cleans houses for extra money on her day “off”. Her husband still works for the same dive resort where he first found employment when he moved to the island. He feels his wages are very low but is afraid to complain because he can easily be replaced.

Karen explained to me the differences between life on the mainland and life on the island, saying, “I think it’s better here because my kids are more open minded . . . they’ve learned English and are not *bruta* like I was before I moved here.” “What does *bruta* mean?” I ask. “Hmm . . . like, ignorant” Karen replied. She went on to tell me:

I’m thankful that my kids could learn English because they will probably have a different outcome than my life. My daughter goes to a private school, the Methodist school where volunteers run it. It’s just an English school. The same people that teach my daughter English help her pay for the school. It costs \$3,000 Lempiras a month (approximately \$150 USD) but they sponsor her and pay for it. They pay for her monthly school fee and I pay for her school supplies and transportation. My daughter used to go to the public school but then the volunteers got to know her. They liked her because she is smart and doesn’t make excuses not to get her homework done. So they offered to sponsor her to go to the



Methodist school. She's not exactly sure what she wants to do after school yet, but right now she's focusing on technical computer science.

In sharp contrast to the general feeling that the Colonia is at best a place of little value, and at worst an ecological and social liability for the island, Karen loves her home and neighborhood. She says that Belfate is the smallest of the four communities in La Colonia and the residents have all lived there a long time. She also legally purchased her land (unlike many newer residents) and does not have to endure land conflicts. I asked Karen if she considers Roatán home or the mainland home. She responded, "Roatán is my home. I don't have any reason to go back to the mainland. There is nothing there for me to want to go back to." Then with a slight chuckle, said, "The only way I'd go back to the mainland is if they forcefully took me off the island!" She went on to explain, "Although the land I live on is small, I like it. There are no bars in my neighborhood so it is quiet. I would never consider moving because I am close to my work and my daughter's school is here." When I asked her if she gardened or grew food on her land she told me that she does not have the space or time to garden. And ironically, commented that she would love to have flowers outside her house, but has a hard time getting them to grow because the soil in Roatán is "no good".

Since criminality is so tied to perceptions of who migrants are, I wanted to discuss the topic with Karen. But I also wanted to be careful so that she did not feel I was holding these stereotypes as true myself. I started by asking, "Is it dangerous on the mainland where you came from?" "Yes," she replied. Then continued:

There is more crime there. There is still crime here, but it is more like once in a blue moon. There you are always hearing about it. Here I could sleep with my door open and the keys outside and no one would bother me. Where I live

everyone is very honest and they don't make fights with each other . . . I mean, it's not that I *would* generally sleep with my door open . . . but if I did, nothing bad would happen.

"So you must know your neighbors pretty well then?" I asked. "Well..." she said with some hesitation, "I'm really only home at night since I work 7 days a week. I don't have time to socialize with my neighbors or even talk to my kids. I only have late at night or really early in the morning to talk to people." Then, trying to move the conversation closer towards her feelings about the migrant threat narrative, I asked, "So what's it like to be from the mainland originally but to now make your home on the island? Do people ever treat you poorly?" She replied, "No. I've never noticed that. People treat me nice, generally. And my employers treat me very well."

Then, something very interesting happened. Unsatisfied with the delicacy with which I was conducting the conversation, my research assistant veered from the written interview guide and interjected a question of her own. Turning to Karen she asked in a non-aggressive, but direct tone, "But how do you feel about the fact that Islanders say mainlanders are the reason why there is so much crime on the island now?" I was a little stunned by the directness of the question. And Karen took a moment to compose herself and plan her response. She then replied carefully:

Look. Honduras is not two parts. Honduras is a whole. And to me, if you are going to commit a crime you are going to do it no matter where you are from. I don't know why people say the island is different than the mainland. I don't believe people move here just to do crime. They come here for jobs. The people who commit crimes in Honduras do it in a circle. They come here for a while . . . then go to the coast . . . then move around to other parts of the country. I don't think race has anything to do with crimes. . . Within any community there are good and bad people. . . and in the Colonia, the only reason people get into fights is because of personal disputes. For example, you probably heard about the wife

that killed her husband and kids in the Colonia? Well that was a *personal* issue between that family.

At this point, I had to pause for a moment to process with morbid humor and fascination that Karen so casually mentioned a woman who killed her husband and kids, then brushed it off as a matter of personal dispute. But her larger point was that criminality was not something inherent to Ladinos. The violence used by the woman against her family was due to a dispute, not indicative that the woman was a career criminal. To her, criminality such as this existed independent of someone's race/ethnicity. While Ladino migration to the island has indeed corresponded with rising crime on the island, crime rates on the island have also corresponded with increased crime in Honduras in general. To Karen, it would be incorrect to attribute Roatán's rising crime rates simply to the growing number of Ladino residents, who she felt moved to the island primarily in search of work.



Figure 2.12: A Ladino high school student tutors a woman learning to read. Both ladies are residents of La Colonia. Photo by author.

## Raul and Sophia

Raul and Sophia offer another example that contradicts the threat narrative, as they fled to Roatán to escape gangs and violence on the mainland. Raul is a 34-year-old father of three who lives in La Colonia. He fled to Roatán when he was eighteen years old to escape certain death in San Pedro Sula at the hands of a gang. Raul became associated with this gang by force because he owned a small business in their territory. In order to keep his business operating and stay alive, he was required to make daily payments to them. According to Raul, gangs control the entire city, with various gangs governing their respective areas. Because of the pervasiveness of gangs in San Pedro Sula, residents have a difficult time not becoming members or affiliates of gangs. And, as Raul put it, “you can’t call the police because they are the same people as the gangsters.” Unfortunately, death is usually the only thing that releases someone from gang affiliation.

Growing increasingly frustrated that he could not afford paying their fees while also supporting his family, Raul came up with a plan to escape the city. At that time, he was the father to two young children and married to their mother, Sophia. He knew that if his family had knowledge of him leaving the city they might be killed as well. One morning he left his home, as he did every day, to work at his shop. But that morning was different. He did not go to work. Instead, without saying a word to his family, he fled town, never to return. He left San Pedro Sula, made it to the coast, and boarded a boat to Roatán, praying for a new life of anonymity. Back in San Pedro Sula, after not being seen for a few days, his distraught family assumed he had been murdered. And in the city with the highest murder rate in the world, this was not an unrealistic assumption.

They mourned his death and tried to figure out how to piece together a livelihood without him. Sophia got a job cleaning the office of a telephone company. She made meager wages. Their two children, eldest daughter Eva and younger son Sam, went to school. Sophia and the kids carried on this way for approximately six years. The family tried to accept the fact that Raul was dead, but it was a difficult existence for Sophia as a single parent.

Then one day, Sophia got unbelievable news from a relative. She had been traveling through Honduras and spent some time in Roatán. One day, while on the island, to her disbelief, she saw someone who looked just like Raul. Not believing her own eyes, she approached him and asked if he was indeed who she thought he was. After some shock on Raul's part, he confessed his identity and explained why he fled from San Pedro Sula and his fears of being found. Word was then sent back to Sophia on the mainland that Raul was alive and well in Roatán, and she decided to quietly move herself and the kids to the island to join him. In what must have been an incredible reunion, the kids and Sophia started their lives again as a family with Raul in the Colonia.

Although they were working to build a new life in Roatán, Raul could not completely escape his past. He did his best to hide his gang affiliation. He covered the tattoos that announced his gang membership with new images. But the fear of being found was still present. As a result, Raul had to learn to forge a livelihood mostly by working from home. He had always been a skilled artist, but he had no outlet for his work in San Pedro Sula. In Roatán's tourism industry, however, he found people ready and willing to buy locally produced art. He has now turned his home into an art studio of sorts, where he carves rocks into turtles, seahorses, fish, and other marine creatures. He

makes jewelry and paints beautiful murals. And he carves trees into benches and stools, many of which are proudly displayed in some of the island's most luxurious resorts. And while production of these crafts can be done from the relative safety of his home, distribution of these products is more precarious.

He was unable to afford a storefront for his work, so sales had to be done by taking crafts on foot to tourist bars and restaurants and selling them face-to-face. Raul did not feel safe making himself so visible, so his children have had to sell his art for him, which has taken away from their schoolwork. Raul and Sophia made the tough decision to keep one child in school and use the other child to sell Raul's handicrafts full time. Schooling is a significant expense for many families in Honduras because children cannot attend school without proper school uniforms and shoes. Parents must also buy other school supplies and educational materials, or their children cannot attend. They placed all their resources in the eldest daughter, Eva, and made the decision that she would complete high school while Sam would sell handicrafts to tourists. In Honduras, kids are only required to go to school until the sixth grade. Eva graduating from high school would be a prestigious and life altering accomplishment. Over the years, the family has scraped together enough funds to consistently send Eva to school. "We hope once she graduates from high school she'll get a good job at a hotel," Raul told me. Sam, however, had been managing to go to school one night a week when I first met him, and was selling handicrafts on the beaches the other 6 days to make money for the family. But by the end of my fieldwork Sam had grown tired from his demanding work schedule and was unable to keep up with schooling, so he stopped going all together.

The family explained to me that this was a difficult choice, but that his economic contribution to the family was too important for him to stop selling. Sophia told me, “He keeps us living. The money Sam makes pays for all of our food.” The money he earned had become even more important, because Raul’s father and his new wife recently moved to the Colonia from San Pedro Sula, along with their 3 children, in hopes of a safer life. Raul’s father, Jorge, told me, “In San Pedro, they kill you just for fun. It is dangerous there. And it is hard to make a living.” Since arriving in Roatán, Jorge, his wife, and kids built a house that, from the looks of it, was no larger than ten by ten square feet, pieced together with various materials and capped with a tin roof. It sat dangerously down a steep valley below Raul’s house that could only be accessed by foot. The house was not serviced by roads, electricity or plumbing, so the family spent most of their time at Raul and Sophia’s house since they had a kitchen, bathroom, electricity, television, and a workspace to make crafts.

While Raul and his family had no history of handicraft production before migrating to Roatán, they have been extremely savvy in the development of their business and in their ability to integrate into the island’s tourism industry, despite serious challenges. They now take special requests for carvings from tourists and Raul is developing relationships with several of the island’s resorts to make custom furniture. Further, the family feels somewhat stable because Eva’s education is a long-term livelihood strategy for the family, while Sam’s work provides the immediate cash to help the family meet their daily needs. And, although he has no experience as an artist, Raul’s father, Jorge, now helps sand wooden benches even though he is not able to move around very well due to old age. The benches they produce are usually carved in the likeness of



indigenous Maya or Paya figures, because they feel they sell well, although they told me they do not consider themselves indigenous.

## Discussion

On March 3, 2016, a well-known indigenous environmental activist named Berta Cáceras was gunned down in her home in rural Honduras. While the Honduran government initially tried to claim her death was simply a robbery gone wrong, political activists argued her death was an assassination ordered by developers trying to implement the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project (Lakhani 2016; 2017). Cáceras was an outspoken critic of the dam, as it would disrupt land ownership in the area. Her death sparked widespread outrage around the world and led to violent protests across Honduras. A short while before her death, Cáceras was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. Around the same time the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) raised concerns about Cáceres's safety and suggested the government of Honduras take special precautions to protect her. But these pleas were made in vain (Lakhani 2016; 2017).

As a result of Cáceras' death, several activists have demanded justice for her assassination. Some of these activists have been beaten and intimidated and in other instances, killed. This political climate has resulted in some analysts declaring that death squads have resurfaced in Honduras. These are essentially privately paid security forces that squash dissent against government supported development projects (Watts 2016). As a result, many Hondurans feel they decreased livelihood options in light of state-sanctioned natural resource development and affiliated land grabs. They also feel they

have limited avenues through which their voices can be heard and through which they can take political action.

Despite growing concerns for the state of human rights in Honduras, environmentalists and other political activists have increasingly been targeted in the country. In fact, two-thirds of environmentalists that are killed worldwide are in Latin America (Fears 2016). The political climate fostering these killings has grown decidedly worse since the 2009 coup of Manuel Zelaya. For example, in 2008, Zelaya blocked a series of hydroelectric dam projects, while generally backing a more progressive agenda that sided with the country's poor. As a result, the country's elite business developers viewed Zelaya as a threat. Less than a year after Zelaya's removal, the new government had approved forty dam contracts and created an environment in which land seizures and displacements of the country's poor have become easier. Things have continued to get worse. In 2013, newly elected president Juan Orlando Hernández ran his campaign on the slogan "Honduras is open for business" (Emmons 2016), with a decidedly pro-development agenda. Migration to Roatán has been one way that marginalized Ladinos cope with conditions such as these. However, Ladino migrants increasingly find themselves unwelcome on the island.

Ironically, a lack of overt environmental activism is one critique lobbied against Ladino migrants by "experts" in Roatán's tourism landscape (for example, the sentiments expressed by the environmental engineer I interviewed). Several local residents echoed this sentiment, as well, when they scoffed at me after I told them I was interested in migrant perceptions of ecological management. Not acknowledged, are the countless activists who have been targeted throughout the country for their efforts to preserve the

natural environment. Nor is the riskiness of espousing such political views recognized by Roatán's stakeholders.

These symbolic forms of violence against Ladino migrants have very real material consequences in their everyday lives because they shape perceptions of migrant worthiness of basic living standards (which are further elaborated below). The threat narrative posits that migrants play a significant role in destabilizing the island's tourism industry through criminal activity and their inability to adapt their livelihoods to the industry. However, I find migrants are much more likely to be the victims of crime than the perpetrators of it, and are especially astute at finding ways to integrate their livelihood strategies into the tourism industry.

Further, I argue the Ladino threat narrative has served to negatively impact tourism development in Roatán because not enough attention was paid to the living conditions of migrants during settlement growth, and as a result, La Colonia is somewhat unsalvageable in terms of infrastructure development. Better infrastructure is desperately needed to stymie sewage runoff and other forms of environmental degradation emanating from the neighborhood, yet there is no clear path to make this happen.

The migrant threat narrative contributes to the poor living conditions in La Colonia, and consequently foments precarity in everyday migrant lives. For example, many parts of the neighborhood only have the pipes that distribute water "turned on" once every five days. In an interview with the President of the local water board, I was told this is because it is too expensive to distribute water to all parts of the neighborhood every day (the electric bill was divided amongst neighborhood residents). As a result, most residents must purchase large plastic drums to store their water (others who could

not afford the drums would use pots and pan to store water). Since the water must last five days, and people are unsure of how much water they might need, they tend to err on the side of storing too much water. When the water is finally turned back on days later, people tend to dump old, unused water into the streets and refill their drums with fresh water for the upcoming days. This uncertainty about water availability in La Colonia inadvertently causes water waste. But it also contributes to sedimentation of the nearby coral reef since water run-off is not properly collected throughout the neighborhood and it washes dirt and garbage into the nearby marine protected area.

This is just one example of how ecological and economic uncertainty are mitigated in everyday life by migrants. This sort of uncertainty can also be seen through the poor infrastructure of electricity. For example, I met a woman who unplugs her fridge daily when she leaves for work, and plugs it back in when she returns home, in an effort to save on her electric bill (which would often climb to more than \$100 USD per month). She hoped her food would stay fresh during the day as long as no one opened the fridge while she was gone. She told me she was pretty sure her bill was so high because new residents of La Colonia were illegally tapping into her electricity. She told the local power company her concerns, but said they threatened that if they had to come out to her house to investigate the issue and her claims were not true, they would charge her a fee. She told me she was sure they threatened her with the fee simply because she was Ladino. Instead of risking it, she decided instead to limit her electricity use as much as possible. This is one more example of the sort of inventive livelihood strategies migrants employ to mitigate overlapping economic and ecological uncertainty. But these examples also demonstrate the economic and environmental “costs” or precarity.

While these forms of uncertainty are locally particular in nature (only receiving water once every five days; an unwillingness of power company employees to address stolen electricity), everyday uncertainty experienced by Ladino migrants cannot be divorced from the broader politics shaping Ladino lives. The Ladino threat narrative, which informs local perceptions of migrants and exaggerates their threat to island tourism, perpetuates the political marginalization of Ladinos in Roatán and adds to everyday uncertainty. In the next chapter, I explore the ways the increased use of surveillance technologies creates additional forms of uncertainty for Ladino migrants, limiting their social and economic mobilities.

## Chapter 3: The Crisis of Mobility: Militarization and Surveillance in Roatán

*"In Honduras, there is no government. There is no president. There is no alcalde (mayor). Look, my mind is open . . . I've lived all over and I can see the whole country as it is. There are only poor people. THAT is Honduras. The people."*

- Ladino police officer in Roatán

On February 7<sup>th</sup> 2014, Roatán's newly elected mayor, Dorn Ebanks, held a public meeting addressing crime and safety on the island. This was his first chance to unveil a security plan to island residents in the wake of escalating crime. The plan was accompanied by a marketing campaign called "The New Roatán," which included a slick new website ([www.thenewRoatán.com](http://www.thenewRoatán.com)), logo, and ambitious motto, "Roatán, Libre de Delito" (Roatán, Crime Free). The new logo was shaped like the island and consisted mostly of tourism and leisure icons, including: snorkel and scuba gear, binoculars, sunglasses, and even an umbrella-adorned cocktail.



Figure 3.1: Roatán's new logo in 2014. From [www.thenewRoatán.com](http://www.thenewRoatán.com)

The plan's convergence of tourism marketing with the promise of increased security was an effort to rebrand the island in the wake of an alarming increase in crime

targeting visitors over the previous year. Soon after the plan was unveiled, Roatán was declared one of the most dangerous ports in the Caribbean (Walker 2014), which, as noted in the introduction, eventually caused the cancellation of several port visits by Norwegian Cruise Line as they feared for both passenger and employee safety. The heightened visibility of crime and associated bad press for the island posed serious threats to the future stability of tourism and the mayor's plan reflected these concerns.

The security plan aimed to make Roatán a “zero crime community” through a three-point approach: first, control of the people entering and exiting the island (discussed in the previous chapter); second, the implementation of security cameras in strategic places around the island; and third, with twenty-four hour patrols of the main road by law enforcement accompanied by “immediate action”. The previous chapter discusses Ladino mobility at a broad scale of analysis, focusing on the politics informing the local government's efforts to limit migration to the island. This chapter focuses on mobility at a more nuanced scale of analysis as it relates to the last two tenets of the plan, which presume that increased surveillance will help eradicate crime. I argue that while proposed surveillance technologies will likely be amiable to tourists (as surveillance aids their leisure mobility), these same policies will deepen vulnerabilities for Ladinos and other marginalized island residents, impeding their social and economic mobilities.

I examine the relationships between mobility and crime, as they are experienced from the points of view of three key actors in Roatán's tourism industry: a police officer, a taxi driver, and a conservation-based NGO employee. While the taxi driver more obviously enables the leisure mobility of tourists, the police officer and NGO employee are also integral parts of Roatán's tourism industry. The NGO featured in this chapter

funds and installs marine infrastructure needed for the scuba industry to exist. It also patrols the island's marine protected area for poaching, implements and enforces zoning changes, and knows conservation laws. The NGO has no policing authority, however, so they need local police to enforce laws. Conversely, policemen do not know conservation policies (Honduran police officers are assigned new posts around the country every few months) and must rely on NGO employees to tell them when people violate laws. Taken together, these three perspectives illuminate the diverse immobilities experienced through crime eradication efforts, and aid in assessing the new security plan's potential impacts on daily life. My analytic approach is to analyze the relationships between the broader structural constraints these actors face and the subjective experiences of those constraints through their perceptions of immobility.

At a broader scale of analysis, I argue the push for increased surveillance in Roatán follows a similar pattern of militarization seen for some time in the Central American region, which has developed more recently on the Honduran mainland. This militarization has been both a response-to and a propagator-of a regional crisis of crime. Fueled in large part by a U.S.-led war on drugs, regional militarization has been shown to be ineffectual in addressing the underlying causes of inequality spurring crime, and critics argue it actually increases crime through creating greater vulnerabilities and burdens for the poor (Main 2014). The rise in both crime and militarization are important push factors prompting Ladino migration to Roatán, and play an important part in examining the broader causes of social and economic immobilities in Honduras. However, while militarization in neighboring countries (such as El Salvador and Guatemala) has been ongoing for decades and its impacts examined, very little research



has been done to understand the impacts of the more recent militarization of Honduras on daily life (Main 2014), and more specifically in an area where mobility is largely shaped by tourism.

## Background

While the Honduran mainland's economy is primarily driven by agriculture, Roatán's economy differs due to its reliance on tourism. This, in turn, structures mobility on the island, as tourism is a significant phenomenon that shapes how people move. Lyon and Wells (2012) argue global tourism is likely the largest movement of goods, services, and people in human history, and for this reason, viewing tourism through the lens of mobility provides a more nuanced approach than "static examinations of tourists and destinations" (4). Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006) argue while tourism plays a key role in understanding contemporary global flows of diverse actors, "mobilities cannot be described without attention to the necessary spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities" (3). Further, an important aspect of fixity in the study of tourism is how people themselves become immobile (e.g. socially or economically) and the role this immobility plays in enabling the mobility of others (Lyon and Wells 2012). To gain an understanding of the dynamic interplays between the mobility and immobility of various actors in Roatán's tourism industry, I draw on work from Birtchnell and Caletrío (2013) who argue leisure travel is an important part of elite global mobility and Monroe (2014) who finds this sort of leisure mobility in ecotourism.

Ecotourism constitutes the fastest growing sector of global tourism and there is a large body of anthropological literature assessing its myriad impacts on the daily lives of those in host communities (for example, Luque et al. 2012, Carrier and Macleod 2005,

Brondo and Woods 2007, Moreno 2005, West et al. 2006). However, Medina (2012) argues that past research on ecotourism has mostly addressed building consensus about its definition and evaluating if ecotourism projects meet their stated goals. She argues that because of this, the questions asked and knowledge produced about this topic often falls within a predetermined framework of analysis that acts primarily to sharpen already existing definitions of the field. She states:

rather than working within the ecotourism problematic to advocate for, critique, or refine a particular definition of ecotourism, I step outside that problematic to explore how efforts to generate and impose universally shared norms and definitions for ecotourism become articulated with the pursuit of other agendas (228).

While not all tourist activities on Roatán are explicitly ecotourism in design, I draw on Medina's approach to move beyond the "ecotourism problematic." Since Roatán's tourist activities are mostly nature-based, power negotiations play out between stakeholders in the name of the industry's stability, which largely hinges on its ecological vitality. Monroe (2014) argues in her analysis of ecotourism that nature becomes the setting for national and political struggles. Similarly, I argue Roatán's nature-based tourism industry becomes the setting in which broader political agendas are enacted (such as limiting Ladino migration and more militantly monitoring poorer residents), so debating the technical definition of ecotourism and how Roatán's tourist activities are classified is less important to this discussion.

My approach towards understanding the interplays between fixity and movement in Roatán's tourism industry is also informed by Manderscheid (2014). She argues, while the mobilities paradigm is based on the premise that the movements of actors cannot be divorced from their various social, economic, cultural, and spatial contexts,

previous research on mobilities has mostly been bifurcated between a focus on subjects and how they move, or on the establishment of larger structures and institutions (such as roads, policies, etc.) that shape mobility. She maintains that less research empirically investigates the interplays between the broader structures shaping mobility and the subjective experience of those structures. This chapter addresses this gap, analyzing how proposed surveillance policies will likely shape everyday life in the form of resident mobility.

To do this, I examine the work of multiple actors in Roatán's tourism industry, whose livelihoods make possible the leisure mobility of others. This builds on research by anthropologists who use *work* as a lens through which mobility is understood. For example, Beth Notar (2012) examines the relationships between taxi drivers and mobility in China. She argues that class becomes spatialized through the practice of taxi driving and examines a range of narratives told by taxi drivers about how they view the links between physical mobility (driving a taxi) and social mobility (the status and resources they receive from it). Further, in her research among delivery drivers in Beirut, Monroe (2014) contends that public spaces become prime places for negotiations of power, especially in interactions between actors with policing authority and marginalized workers who are the recipients of such regulations. She argues, "Being scrutinized and bullied by the state is but one way in which the bodies of foreign workers are hierarchically positioned in Beirut's public space" (89). Similarly, Chavez's (2013) work on the Latino threat narrative in the United States emphasizes the links between surveillance and power. Using a Foucauldian framework, he argues surveillance of migrant populations serves as a public "spectacle" that reinforces the power of the state

over vulnerable populations, drawing a clear line between citizens and the “other”. This chapter brings together these theoretical and methodological perspectives through an examination of the ways crime eradication efforts shape how diverse island residents move (socially and economically) as they work. I understand the relationships between structural constraints and mobility as the former being broader cultural, legal, financial, and physical forces shaping how people move, while the latter is the subjective experiences of those forces. In my analysis, I include two different policing agents (an NGO employee and a policeman) as well as an actor who is frequently policed (a taxi driver).

#### The Security Meeting and its Framing of Surveillance



Figure 3.2: Mayor Dorn Ebanks speaking at security meeting. The panel includes government officials and law enforcement. From *Teledifusora Insular*, (February 7, 2014).



Figure 3.3: The crowd at the mayor's security meeting. From *Teledifusora Insular*, (February 7, 2014).

The security meeting was held in Roatán's airport lobby, where neat rows of white plastic chairs were set up facing a panel consisting of the mayor, municipal police chief, national police officers, municipal government officials, and the mayor's new security advisor. From my count, there were around 50 people in attendance. Many attendees were American and European expats. Much of the rest of the audience was made up of Honduran business owners, and it seemed there were very few Hondurans of lower socio-economic status at the meeting. I arrived at the airport around 5:00 p.m. Unsurprisingly, the meeting, which was scheduled to start at 5:30, did not begin until around 6:30. Workers busily scurried around setting up lighting, microphones, tablecloths, signs with the mayor's new logo and other decorations while the audience

patiently waited. The meeting was held in both Spanish and English to accommodate all attendees.



Figure 3.4: Billy Joya presentation. The mayor’s security advisor presents the plan to make Roatán crime free. From *Teledifusora Insular*, (February 7, 2014).

As the audience waited, a pale skinned, well-dressed, middle-aged man warmed up the crowd. He shook peoples’ hands and made small talk, all while displaying a beaming smile. And as if out of a movie, he even kissed the heads of babies sitting on their parents’ laps. I would soon learn that this man was Billy Joya, the mayor’s new security advisor. I had heard of Joya in the days leading up to the meeting, as word spread throughout the island of his new position. In discussing the situation with a friend, she quipped with typical Islander humor, “when we heard Billy Joya was coming to the island, everyone said ‘well . . . who’s he here to kill?’”

Due to his controversial past, which includes allegations of human rights abuses, Joya has a reputation that precedes him. His participation in the security meeting very well could have played a part in the low attendance. Even though there were relatively few island residents at the security meeting, his presence did not go unnoticed.

Joya is a former police captain and former leader of a Honduran death squad. He joined the Honduran military police in 1981 in the midst of the Cold War as former U.S. President Ronald Reagan spent tens of millions of dollars staging covert operations in Honduras to fight leftist forces in the region. Joya was a member of the infamous Battalion 316, a military unit responsible for political assassinations and the torture of individuals suspected of supporting communism. The battalion was trained at both the U.S. military base in Honduras and by the C.I.A. in the United States.

As a result of his time in this unit, Joya is accused of numerous tortures and disappearances by human rights watch groups. The most notable case against him stems from his alleged involvement with the torture of six university students who were suspected of opposing the Honduran government. Yet, despite a multitude of charges against him, Joya has never been convicted of any of these crimes and adamantly denies all wrongdoing. In defense of himself, Joya claims the media has a vendetta against him, resulting in the public's negative perception of him. But human rights groups argue that his lack of conviction stems from a deeply corrupt Honduran political system that protects those who are well connected with deep pockets. A 2009 New York Times article entitled "A Cold War Ghost Reappears in Honduras" captures the complexities of Joya's life history well, saying:



Mr. Joya's conflicting images — a vilified figure who portrays himself as a victim — are as hard to reconcile as his life story. Human rights groups consider him one of the most ruthless former operatives of an American-backed military unit, known as Battalion 316, responsible for kidnapping, torturing and murdering hundreds of people suspected of being leftists during the 1980s.

Today, Mr. Joya, a 52-year-old husband and father of four, has become a political consultant to some of the most powerful people in the country . . .

Mr. Joya looks straight out of central casting, though not for the role of a thug. He has more of the smooth, elegant bearing of a leading man. And in the 14 years since he was first brought to trial on charges of illegally detaining and torturing six university students, he has undertaken a solitary quest — one that can at times border on obsession — aimed not only at defending himself, but also at vindicating the government's past fight against Communism (Thompson, 2009).

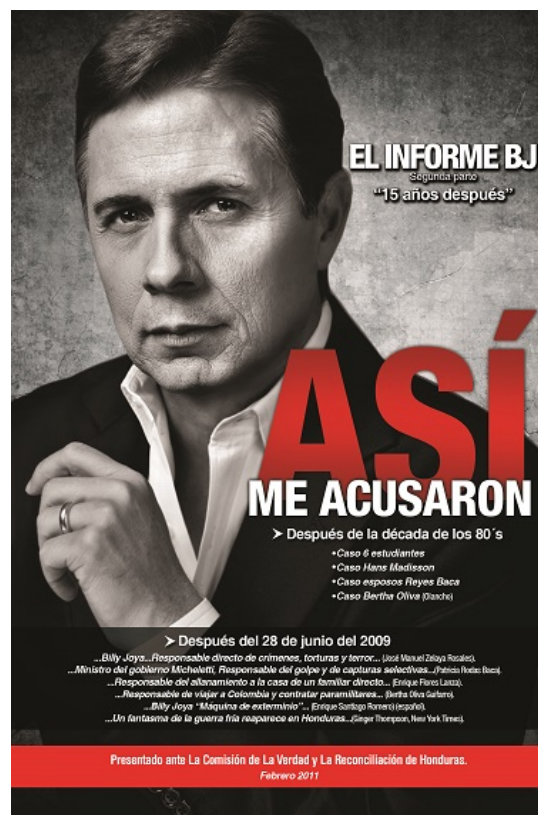


Figure 3.5: Joya's 2011 book: *Así Me Acusaron* (*So They Accused Me*). From: [www.billyjoya.com](http://www.billyjoya.com)

Joya addressed the crowd to start the meeting, setting the stage for the mayor's new plan. After a short introduction, he laid out how the plan came into being, saying:



Most mayors don't assume the responsibility of crime. They expect the national government will do it . . . but in the month of December, the mayor came to my office . . . and he expressed that he wanted to make Roatán a zero crime community. We have never heard a mayor in Honduras say the same thing. Let's take advantage of the political stance of the mayor, together!

After outlining the three points of the plan, he described in more detail how the plan for surveillance would unfold. Joya argued it would be possible to make Roatán crime free within one year if the plan was followed. The plan would cost around \$970,000 USD and would result in the construction of six new police outposts, which would be equipped to service tourists, as well as the construction of a twenty-four hour 911 center. The municipality would also buy patrol boats, police vehicles, weaponry, GPS systems, and provide training and certification for officers.

Joya then pivoted towards framing surveillance as a necessary and good-natured turn for the island. He argued that Roatán's security is distinctly important in the country of Honduras, stating:

The island has completely different circumstances than the mainland. In the mainland, say there are nineteen murders a month. If here we have one murder every three months, we have more problems than the mainland. . . So the mayor has designed with me that Roatán should be crime free.

Joya stressed, "I want to be emphatic that this is *not* militarization of the island. It *has* to be friendly!" He went on to say that the island also had to be "a place with order and attractive to tourism." Joya continued to justify the security plan and its importance in protecting the local economy, saying that in Roatán:

If the crimes go up, the economy goes down . . . If tomorrow the island is deserted by investors because of crime, we're all losing. . . The central government doesn't

have as a first priority security on this island. As a matter of fact, police on this island have very little resources . . . This is why we shouldn't keep waiting for the central government.

Joya's description of the plan framed the consequences of crime in economic terms and glossed over its human costs. For example, many Ladino migrants I spoke to cited fear of violence and crime as critical factors prompting them to move to the island. Yet the intense fear they felt on a daily basis and its impacts on daily life were not addressed. The mainland could tolerate more murders, Joya reasoned, because it would have less impact on their economy than in tourism-dependent Roatán. If island residents and business owners wanted tourism to flourish and the economy to grow, crime reduction was a must. And while Joya was adamant that increased weaponry coupled with 24-hour surveillance and patrols was *not* militarization, I argue it would likely feel like it to island residents.

Joya's goal of crime eradication, not just reduction, is strikingly dubious in a country with the highest murder rate in the world and known for its rampant corruption. The judicial system is set up in a way to favor and absolve Honduran elites. Therefore, island crime eradication efforts would likely target poorer residents who cannot bribe their way out of charges. The nearly million-dollar security plan, notably, does not address poverty, education, wages, or improving infrastructure on the island. Instead, the plan is based on surveillance, which is a powerful tool that shapes how, when, and where people move.

This chapter takes a careful look at how the techniques used to fight crime in Honduras foment inequality. I do this thorough an analysis of the perceived immobilities

stemming from structural constraints experienced by ordinary workers in the island's tourism industry. In what follows, I examine how crime is negotiated, contested, and manufactured in Roatán by three island residents who work in tourism to demonstrate the ways the island's industry of leisure mobility is attempting to stabilize itself through the immobility of others, namely an underpaid and largely informal workforce.



Figure 3.6: Roatán mayor Dorn Ebanks. Standing beside a screen showing multiple scenes of video surveillance on the island. From [www.thenewroatán.com](http://www.thenewroatán.com) (February 2016).

### The Policeman

One afternoon I was getting a ride home from a police officer after a long day of working with a local charity. The charity usually did not get assistance from police officers. But that day our group desperately needed a truck to deliver supplies to schoolchildren after our planned transportation fell through. Resourcefully, the director of the charity called local police to see if they could be of some help. To our surprise, an

officer was willing to use his time and a police truck to help us. The police chief viewed it as an opportunity to improve their relationship with island residents and the policeman himself was happy to take a break from his normal duties. His superior agreed to the arrangement as long as he took photos throughout the day of our charity work to prove he was spending his time as he said he would. Over the course of the day, the police officer and I got to know each other a bit. He had a wife and a small child on the mainland (where he was from). He got to see them when he was off-duty on the weekends. He was young – in his early 20's – and had only been a police officer for 5 months.

At the end of the day, the policeman dropped each of the volunteers off at their homes. Because he and I lived in the same community, I was the last to be taken home, giving us additional time to chat. After some time alone in his truck, unexpectedly, he asked me, “So . . . are you religious”? Somewhat puzzled, I replied, “Me? No . . . I’m not religious.” A look of confusion came over his face. I quickly realized he was trying to understand what my involvement was with the local charity. He knew I was living on the island and most American volunteers are missionaries or somehow affiliated with churches. Once I figured out why he was confused, I explained that I was a student from the U.S. doing a research project on the island. “Ohhh!” He exclaimed, with a look of satisfaction washing over his face that the mystery had been solved. I explained briefly that I was interested in the economy of the island and the impacts of mainland migration on tourism and conservation efforts. He said he was very interested in my topic and that he had lots to say about the state of Honduras. As we continued driving down the winding island roads, we chatted about his life and my research.

I found out that before going to school for a year to become a policeman, he sold cell phones on the mainland. He did not like the job, though, because his boss treated him very poorly. Things came to a head one day when his boss refused to pay him money he was owed for work already completed. He decided to quit. Afterwards, he continued to contact his boss to ask for his money. But his boss told him, “That was your choice. You left. So I’m not going to pay you anything.”

I told him how terrible it was that he was never paid for his work. He nodded, paused briefly, and then continued, “In Honduras, you have no rights. I didn’t have the money to sue my boss, so I couldn’t do anything about it.” That’s when he decided to go to school to become a police officer. In the short five months he had spent working in his new career, he had already learned much about the difficulties of being a policeman in Honduras. He found it challenging to bring charges against wealthier individuals due to the corruption in the legal system encouraged by bribes. He also found it difficult to charge and arrest poorer individuals due to widespread poverty in the country and his own empathy towards them.

He went on to tell me that his job was complicated in part because he had not fully learned yet who had bribed the authorities and was therefore out of the reach of the law. On one occasion, he arrested a man who was clearly breaking the law and took him to the police station to be charged. He was then told by his superior to let the man go free and to drop the charges. He soon learned by his superior that the man had previously bribed local officials and he was instructed that the man should not be arrested in the future, even though he would continue to break the law. Summing up the situation, he told me:

I can't arrest certain people because they have paid off the government. . .In Honduras, *everything* is for sale.

Desperate to support his family, he went on to explain why even *he* is now for sale:

I only make \$350 (USD) per month. That's not much! An example: If I catch someone with drugs and they say to me 'I'll give you \$100' . . . And I can get that kind of money here (in Roatán), not on the mainland . . . Well I mean . . .

Then taking a long, deep breath and exhaling:

Fuuuuuuck...I'm going to take it. I'll say 'ok, but don't tell anyone I caught you. Just go...

But if I get the money, I will use it on my family on the mainland. If you interview a thief, if you talk to them and ask 'why did you steal?' They would tell you it was for food or for their family. But it is lies...It is for drugs, for alcohol, for women. They don't steal to give to their family...

It's just like, many people go to the U.S. for work . . . but they waste their money too. They use it for alcohol, drugs, whores. They don't send it back to their families.

Then, as we turned down a dusty dirt road, passing several modest houses tucked back in some trees, he suddenly brought his truck to a stop. There were two Islander men sitting outside on the stoop of a house with something in their hands. At first, I saw nothing out of the ordinary. "They have an iguana!" he said to me. And I realized they were preparing an iguana for a meal. Iguanas are endangered and therefore a protected species on the island. It is illegal to hunt them. However, Islanders have a cultural tradition of iguana hunting and consumption and many continue to illegally kill and eat them despite laws forbidding it. Most feel it is a proud part of their heritage and there is a black market for iguana meat on the island.

As the policeman stopped his vehicle, the two men stood up. To my surprise, they did not run or try to hide the iguana. Instead they puffed their chests out and took a step towards us, in a somewhat confrontational manner. Without getting out of his truck, the policeman sat and assessed the situation for a few seconds (which felt like an eternity to me as I nervously waited to see if an altercation would ensue). After thinking it over, the policeman drove off without saying a word to the men. Then, turning towards me he said, “Ahh...they’re just going to eat it I think. If they were going to sell it to make money – well that’s another issue. But since they are going to eat it themselves I don’t mind so much.”

We continued driving. After a few moments, feeling the need to explain his actions to me, he settled back in his seat, then continued reflectively, “In Honduras, there is no government. There is no president. There is no alcalde (mayor). Look, my mind is open...I’ve lived all over and I can see the whole country as it is. There are *only* poor people. *THAT* is Honduras. The people.”

His words stuck with me. He understood the broad structural constraints Hondurans face (low wages, corruption in the judicial system, and poverty) and saw how these constraints manifested in daily life as economic and social immobilities. He had this understanding not only as a result of travelling throughout the country and analyzing the contexts of criminality, but also because just a short time before he was living those immobilities himself as a phone salesman. Frustrated with a boss who treated him poorly and withheld his wages, he attempted to address his economic immobility by going to school and becoming a police officer. Yet, his new career presented him with fresh impediments to social and economic mobility. Challenged with the temptation of taking

bribes to supplement his (still) low pay, he could move ahead economically but would have to risk his own personal and career safety by getting involved with drug cartels. He also struggled with enforcing the law against poorer Hondurans, as he understood that breaking the law was often the difference between eating and going hungry. His understanding of Honduras was that institutions that were meant to protect the country's citizens (government officials, the President, the alcalde) were largely ineffectual at serving the country's poor. Therefore, he seemed to treat law enforcement as a highly subjective endeavor due to the combined factors of high levels of corruption, existing alongside widespread poverty. For these reasons, I argue increased surveillance of island residents would ameliorate neither crime nor immobilities, but instead foment increasing vulnerabilities for law enforcement officials as well as poorer citizens.

#### The Conservation NGO Employee

A conservation – focused, non-governmental organization (NGO) employee named Jaime has his own struggles with law enforcement on the island. Jaime's organization was responsible for installing and maintaining scuba infrastructure in the island's marine protected area. The island's dive industry, and therefore a large chunk of island tourism, relied on this organization's work for the dive industry to flourish. His organization also performed patrols of nearby waters to watch for environmental crimes. Jaime explained the difficulties he faced in enforcement of environmental laws in terms of scale. He told me that because his job covers all levels of environmental infractions, he finds himself doing a range of activities from small-scale policing of individuals using spear guns to fish, to watching for groups of people or communities using illegal gill nets, to the even larger-scale of wealthy investors who dredge the reef to build their



resorts. He said he wants to give attention to all scales but does not have the time or resources. While it is easier to prosecute small-scale offenders who cannot fight him in court, he often chooses to build cases against large-scale violators because they pose the greatest risk to the marine environment. The policing actions of this NGO are highly politicized in Roatán and create challenges for garnering widespread community support. A significant portion of their operating budget comes from donations from local businesses. Therefore, their popularity (especially amongst dive shop and resort owners) plays a large role in their financial ability to continue their efforts to patrol and protect the reef. The organization also engages in community education and outreach, so the success of these programs largely hinges on their good standing with everyday members of the community (who they, at times, must police).

Reiterating the policeman's concerns with corruption in the Honduran legal system, Jaime explained that it is far more difficult to prosecute a powerful individual for an environmental crime than an average citizen. An important part of his job is to serve as an expert in court to testify against business owners, developers, and poachers who violate conservation policies in Roatán (the organization does not have policing authority but works as an intermediary to report criminal activity to police). But, in his view, the courts and politicians really do not care about upholding conservation policies, so he has to work very hard to bring cases against offenders. It was not uncommon for him to spend an entire year in a court battle to build a case against a violator. He learned that if he was going to bring a case against someone, he needed to make sure he had a large amount of well-documented evidence already in place. He described this process as

“playing the game,” which had to be done at the right time, with the right political pressure.

An example he gave me was that he might know a wealthy business owner dredged the reef to put in a resort, but he would wait to report the violation until the “right” moment. Dredging is illegal (without special permission), but many business owners get away with environmental infractions by paying bribes. Jaime’s strategy would be to wait until a controversial situation or highly publicized event took place that would provide him greater political, public, or governmental support for the charges. Trying to prosecute a powerful individual without ample evidence and/or broader political support would risk creating an enemy in the community and threaten the organization’s funding, without scoring an environmental win.

Beyond the legal immobilities Jaime faced when prosecuting business owners violating environmental laws, he also faced threats to his own personal safety from the broader community. Law enforcement efforts often resulted in threats or acts of violence from violators. For example, while the waters in the main tourist areas of the island are patrolled every day, the organization occasionally made surprise visits to remote parts of the island to check for illegal fishing activities. Sweeps like this occurred a few times while I was living in Roatán and often resulted in dramatic confrontations. I remember after one particular sweep, several non-profit staff received death threats for confiscating illegal spear guns and nets. After I expressed some surprise at the severity of the threats, Jaime told me death threats happened frequently, which was especially stressful in a small island setting where many people knew where he lived. In part because of the dangers of the job, staff turnover is very high at this particular organization. This creates

barriers for continued community support and impedes winning drawn-out court cases, which often hinge on staff testimony.

The main structural constraints Jaime faced were a lack of funding, inability to enforce environmental laws (without the help of a policeman), widespread poverty and diminishing fish populations that led residents to fish illegally (resulting in death threats), and corruption in the Honduran judicial system. In his subjective experiences with these constraints, Jaime seemed to feel less conflicted about the ethics of enforcing environmental laws against poor residents than the policeman, but similarly faced multiple immobilities in trying to address crime. Small-scale law enforcement efforts often resulted in emotional and sometimes dangerous confrontations with residents. Large-scale law enforcement against developers and business owners put the organization's financial support at risk. Court cases were often long, drawn out affairs that were impeded by corruption, lack of funding, or staff turnover and required careful political savvy. The proposed increase of surveillance by the island's mayor could indeed be successful in catching more instances of residents breaking environmental laws. However, this would not address the underlying causes of poaching (such as low wages and a lack of jobs) or ecological decline (from climate change, overfishing, or dredging). As a result, increased surveillance efforts on the island would likely exacerbate vulnerabilities for NGO employees (via harassment and threats) while creating additional vulnerabilities for everyday citizens (in the form of fines or jail time) who already struggle to move forward socially and economically.



Figure 3.7: A sign in Roatán’s marine protected area. Touching wildlife carries a fine of 500 Lemprias, approximately \$20 USD. Photo by author.

### The Taxi Driver

Gio, a taxi driver I got to know well during my fieldwork, is a prime example of how increased surveillance would shape mobility for a typical low-wage worker in Roatán’s tourism industry. Around mid-summer, I had been told by one of my island friends that it was “iguana season” and the black market for iguana meat was in full swing. I wanted to better understand the situation, so one day while riding with Gio to an interview, I decided to see if I could gain some perspective on the issue. After talking for a bit about how he was and what he had been up to since the last time I saw him, I asked “So...I hear it’s iguana season?” After a careful pause, he slowly replied, “Hmmm...yeah, well you know...hunting iguanas is illegal.”

I wanted to let him know that I was not judging the practice, but was trying to understand the circumstances around poaching. I replied, “Yeah, I know...but I hear most Islanders have a history of eating iguanas and they view it as part of their heritage.” I saw his reluctance fade, and he replied, “Yeah, that’s true...” And then with a laugh, he admitted, “I love iguanas! Man, they are good! Mmmmmm...as a kid I learned how to hunt iguanas with dogs.” “With dogs?!” I asked surprised. “Yeah, because iguanas are smart. They’re really smart. And you need the dogs to help catch them...My cousin and I just caught some the other day. I got \$30 for them,” he said proudly. “Wow. That’s a lot of money” I replied. And he nodded in agreement. I was actually slightly relieved he made some money, as a recent series of unfortunate events put him on the brink of losing his livelihood.

I had heard about his financial troubles earlier that week when Gio picked me up to drive me to an interview. That morning I got in his cab he was uncharacteristically quiet. Thinking this was odd, I asked how his night was. After a little hesitation, he told me he was worried about resolving an issue with the police that had happened the night before that left him without a driver’s license or car registration. He was especially nervous while driving me to the interview because he was driving illegally. If he were to be caught, his taxi license would be suspended for months, leaving him without an income. When I insisted it would have been no problem for me if he had cancelled our trip (I could have easily taken a different taxi), he admitted he desperately needed the money, although he knew he was taking a big risk.

He explained that he had gone out to a bar the night before at the urging of a friend. According to Gio, he really did not want to go to this bar, but his friend was

trying to pick up a certain girl, and wanted to go there to “give it a try”. So Gio went, parking his taxi on the side of the street outside the bar. He and his friend went in to the bar and got a drink. Things were uneventful at first. But soon after, a man with a reputation for drinking too much and known for picking fights walked up to him and out of nowhere declared, “I really want to punch you right now.” Gio was taken aback. He and this man had not exchanged a word that night. There was nothing that prompted this aggression. And Gio does not like to fight, telling me, “Me and my whole family...we is laid back people. We don’t want no trouble. Never...but if trouble comes a lookin’ for you, you’ve got to face it. You can’t run away.”

Gio said even though he did not want to fight the man, the whole bar was watching the confrontation and he could not run away. The man pushed him. So Gio pushed him back. But then, luckily, the crowd intervened and restrained both Gio and the other man so they could not fight. That was the end of it and no one got hurt. But soon after, a couple of police officers, who heard the commotion, came into the bar. On their way in, they noticed two cars were blocking the road and asked who the owners were. Gio went outside to look and saw that another car had come and parked parallel to his car, not leaving enough room for cars to pass in between them on the road. So Gio explained to the police officers that one of the cars was his, but that when he parked there he was not blocking anything and that it was the other car’s fault. But the police said they were going to issue him a ticket anyway.

There was one small catch though. These police officers were not traffic police and therefore did not have the authority to issue parking tickets. Instead, the policemen told Gio that he would have to follow them to the police station to receive his ticket there.

Gio refused. Things started to escalate and they asked him if he had been drinking. Indignant, Gio replied, “What that gotta do with nothing? That don’t matter if I’ve been drinking. I’m standing here on my two feet – not driving my car! So you don’t need to know that!” In response, the policemen insisted he follow them to the station. But Gio stood his ground and told them, “I mean you no disrespect, but I am not going with you. I don’t need to drive nowhere. You can take my license. Take my registration. But I’m not driving anywhere with you.” The police officers agreed to his compromise, taking his driver’s license and car registration to the station. They told him he could pick up his documents at the police station the following day after he paid his ticket for blocking traffic.

But Gio did not have the money to pay for his ticket in the morning, so he came to pick me up for my interview, so he could earn some cash. That’s when I found out he was driving illegally. He explained to me that taking a person’s license and registration is common practice by traffic police in Honduras. However, the ticket they issue a person acts as proof of license and registration until the ticket is paid. That way, if you get pulled over before you get a chance to pay it, you can prove to the officer that you are a legal driver. But because it was regular police (not traffic police) who charged Gio with the ticket (that they themselves could not write), they had no ticket to give him in exchange.

After telling me the story, I asked Gio why he would not just go with the police to the station to get his ticket that night. He explained to me:

Man...you've got to be smart (and he tapped his head with his finger several times). If I would have followed them to the station it would have been way worse. The traffic police at the station have a Breathalyzer. When I would have gotten there, they would have given me a fine for blocking traffic, but then they would have made me take the Breathalyzer test too! Now . . . last night I wasn't drinking and driving. I was drinking at the bar. But now if I'm at the station they can nail me for drinking and driving too!

And the penalty for a DUI would have been devastating for Gio. The penalty is a 7,000 Lempira fine (about \$350) plus they take your license away for six months – making it impossible for him to drive his taxi and make a living for an entire half-year.

Soon after explaining this to me and while still driving, his phone rang. It was the policeman from the night before. After a short exchange, he hung up and relayed the conversation to me. The policeman said to Gio, “So, I’m here at the station with your license and registration...but I haven’t turned your ticket into my boss yet...so what are you going to do?” Gio, exasperated, replied “What do you mean *what am I going to do?* What are *you* going to do?! What do you want?!” Clarifying for me, he paused and said, “He was looking for a bribe.”

Attempting to shift the balance of power, Gio said to the policeman, “You know what I’m going to do?...I’m going to talk with my lawyer and call you back.” He hung up the phone. That’s when he turned and looked at me and said sneakily “I don’t have a lawyer!” And then we both had a good laugh. The truth is Gio cannot afford a lawyer. But he said police get very scared when you tell them you have one. He also told me they get very nervous if you talk to the media. He had tried this strategy the night before at the bar. While the police were trying to convince him that he had to get in his car and follow them to the station, Gio threatened that he was going to tell the local news station



that they were harassing him. He said policemen are scared of bad press because if an officer gets too many complaints filed against them they will be transferred back to the mainland (or fired if they are too bad). And according to Gio, the island is a very desirable place to be stationed:

Because you don't have to do anything. You just hang around West End all day...talk to people. On your days off you go to the beach. Man, this is the life! This is easy here! But on the mainland, man...they kill cops left and right. Everyday cops get killed there. So they're scared if you complain about them. They don't want to go back to the mainland.

At that point, Gio dropped me off at my interview and we planned that I would call him when I was done so he could come get me. The interview lasted around an hour and a half. But when I called him later, he was at the police station negotiating with the police. I took a different taxi home. When I caught up with him the following day, I found out he ended up paying around a seventy-dollar bribe to the policeman in exchange for his ticket not being turned in. It also got him his license and registration back. While it was better than potentially being charged with blocking traffic or a DUI, this was a huge financial setback for him. Sadly, it was just one event in a string of events that kept him in a cycle of economic and social immobility.

A few months earlier Gio's taxi was vandalized. He told me he lives in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods on the island called "El Swampo" (The Swamp). El Swampo is located in a low-lying part of Roatán's commercial center, Coxen Hole. Trying to describe the neighborhood to me, Gio said, "it's like the Bronx in New York."

"Oh, you've been to the Bronx? I've actually never been to New York" I told him. "Well...no. I've never been to the U.S.," he admitted. "But from what I hear,

that's what it's like" he assured me.

In addition to its reputation for crime, El Swampo is also an older neighborhood with especially poor infrastructure, located on the coastline and positioned lower than the rest of town, making it susceptible to frequent floods. Gio knows it is risky to leave his taxi parked outside his house overnight because of these factors. He worked out a deal with the night watchman (colloquially called a Watcheeman or Watchee for short) of a nearby store, located just up the hill from El Swampo on higher ground. He and the Watchee agreed that he could park his car in the businesses' parking lot overnight. The Watchee would make sure nothing bad happened to it if he paid 100 Lempiras (five dollars) per night. This was easy money for the Watchee. He was already being paid by the business to stand guard with a gun all night long to prevent theft. Allowing Gio to park his car in the store's parking lot posed virtually no extra work but gave him extra income.

All went well with this plan for a while. But one night around 3 a.m., Gio was walking home from the bar and had to travel past the parking lot to get to his house. Since it was on his way, he decided to check on his car. From a distance, he could see his car in the lot and felt relieved it was safe. But as he got closer he saw what appeared to be a smashed front windshield. At this point in the story he paused to tell me his initial reaction, which was that he thought he was "just drunk and seeing things." He explained that just a short time before, he had fixed a smashed windshield on his taxi and hoped his brain was playing tricks on him. The windshield had been broken when he was driving an American couple to the airport. He explained that a rogue coconut fell from out of nowhere, landing on his windshield and cracking it. Coconut trees line many roads in

Roatán so it is not too surprising that one might fall at just the wrong time.

He had just scraped together enough money to get it fixed. And when he saw his car in the lot he was sure he was just drunk and imagining the windshield as it had been before he repaired it. He kept rubbing his eyes. Blinking harder. But nothing helped. Once he got to his car he saw that the windshield was indeed broken. Then, looking more closely at the car, he realized his battery and radio were stolen too. Furious, he scanned the parking lot for the Watchee, but he was nowhere to be found. He went looking for him. He knew exactly where he lived because he had a house in El Swampo too. Gio walked to his house and knocked on the door. The Watchee, bleary eyed and half asleep, answered the door. He was shocked to see Gio, but quickly explained he got hungry and decided to go home for a snack.

After Gio told him what happened to his car, he told the Watchee he was holding him responsible for the damages, which would be around \$300. Gio knew the exact price because he had just paid to get his windshield fixed. Incredulous, the Watchee exclaimed, “I can’t afford that!” Then, shifting the blame, told Gio, “You only pay me \$5 a night! How do you expect me to be able to afford \$300 on \$5 a night?!” Gio told him that it did not matter what he paid him. An agreement was an agreement, and the Watchee had guaranteed he would keep his car safe. After much discussion, Gio finally got him to agree that they would split the bill, paying \$150 each. But months later as Gio told me the story, he had seen no money from the Watchee and had to pay the whole bill himself.

This string of unfortunate events created significant economic and social immobilities for Gio. He has never been able to get ahead enough financially to buy his

own taxi. Because of this, he must rent his car for \$20 a day (the standard rate). But after having to pay for two broken windshields along with a new battery and radio, the \$70 bribe to the policeman for the traffic violation was devastating. He got behind on his car payments. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the man renting him the car grew tired of Gio not being able to pay him. He took away the car, leaving Gio embarrassed and with no ability to earn a living. In his 20's, he still lived with his mom and was unmarried, as he could not afford a place of his own.

While the immobilities Gio experienced are particular to his circumstance, personality, and in part, luck, they exemplify a pattern of impediments faced by the average worker in Roatán's tourism industry. Workers often find themselves immobile (socially, legally, and economically) as a result of poor infrastructure (e.g. El Swampo), lack of access to credit (e.g. to buy a taxi) or due to police corruption (e.g. the solicitation of the bribe). They must battle a combination of misfortune, exploitation, rising crime, climate change, and low wages – finding themselves in situations that result in cycles of uncertainty that are hard to shake. For these reasons, I argue increased surveillance of the labor force in Roatán would have disastrous impacts on the daily lives and livelihoods of average citizens working in the tourism industry. People like Gio already find themselves enmeshed in webs of immobility and struggle to *move* as a result of broad structural constraints. Making the primary goal of the security plan crime eradication, with no accompanying commitment to job creation, access to finance, increased wages, or better flood prevention, would be a dangerous propellant of structural violence which would threaten to destabilize island tourism through economic and social harm.

## Discussion

Since the 2009 overthrow of president Manuel Zelaya, militarization in Honduras has sharply increased. Zelaya's successor, Porfirio Lobo Sosa, revised the Honduran constitution to allow for the country's military to occupy police positions in 2011. Soon after, military personnel were sent to airports and tourist locations, along with major cities and neighborhoods. Lobo also proposed legislation that would put the military in charge of prisons. Since that time, militarization has continued. The country's current president, Juan Orlando Hernandez, ran on a campaign that touted the slogan "a soldier on every corner." Since his election, he has expanded the role of the military even further, to schools, buses, and roads. This rise in militarization has resulted in a sharp increase in reported human rights abuses such as murders, tortures, and illegal detentions at the hands of the military (Rawley 2017).

Yet detailed information about the amount of funding (mostly coming from the U.S.) fueling Honduran militarization as well as how it shapes daily life for the majority poor is lacking. In other parts of Central America where militarization has been ongoing for some time (for example, in the name of the War on Drugs), homicide rates have typically gone up and crime rates soared. With the steady expansion of the country's military into positions once reserved for public servants and police, the proliferation of patrols and surveillance in Roatán presents clear opportunities for future militarization and subsequent impediments to mobility.

Past research on mobility assumed that movement led to increasing forms of mobility. However, more recent contributions to the field of mobility studies by anthropologists have shown that simply moving is not the same as mobility. While many

people move, mobility is not a resource equally accessed by all. For example, many of the world's poor move as a result of forced migration due to climate change, natural disaster, or economic uncertainty. This contrasts with elite forms of mobility such as when people travel to fulfill cultural ideals about class and identity, or for fun and leisure (Burns and Novelli 2008). As can be seen in Roatán, and demonstrated in past research, these elite forms of global mobility are in large part enabled by the immobility of others (Lyon and Wells 2012).

Exemplifying this phenomenon, Roatán's municipal government argues the island has distinct security concerns from the mainland due to their reliance on tourism. They further argue that intensified surveillance of island residents is not a form of militarization, but instead, must be "friendly" and done in a way that is appealing to tourists. I argue, however, that the lived experience of increased surveillance for most island residents will have negative impacts on mobility, following a similar pattern being observed in the region as a result of widespread militarization.

The highly publicized uses of surveillance in the mayor's plan, amidst the backdrop of anti-Ladino fervor, reinforces hierarchies of power leading to racial, class, and economic divisions amongst a diverse island population. Analyzing the specific ways policing affects the work of actors in the island's tourism industry is a useful way to understand power configurations and how they can be viewed through the lens of mobility. This analysis points to a larger crisis of mobility facing the country's majority poor, as they try to improve their lives and livelihoods, yet often find themselves constrained by various structural arrangements.

At a cursory level, the immobilities experienced by workers in Roatán's tourism industry seem to be examples of poverty. I argue, however, there are some distinct features of contemporary life in Honduras that point to a more complex entanglement of factors that lead to such immobility. Poorer Hondurans are not just experiencing a lack of money, but a corrupt judicial system that extorts them, a diminishing natural resource base from which to draw their livelihoods, and the suffocating extension of militarization of nearly every aspect of life. Other broader trends of global precarity, such as land grabbing (and associated landlessness) are creating fewer viable livelihood options (as demonstrated by the policeman). A lack of adequate funding by the Honduran national government for marine conservation constrains local efforts (for example the work of the NGO employee) to protect marine resources and exposes people to acts of physical violence (death threats). And a lack of infrastructure (which could address climate change and rising sea levels) exacerbates flooding in Roatán, which disproportionately affects poorer residents (such as Gio, who lives in the low-lying neighborhood of El Swampo because he cannot afford to live anywhere else). The growing trend of increasing militarization in Honduras (backed by powerful countries such as the U.S.) is a disturbing new facet of regional precarity. Overall, the confluence of broader economic and environmental uncertainties is creating complex power formations that constrain everyday life in amplified ways. This chapter brings to light some of the very specific, nuanced ways this broader precarity is subjectively experienced through immobilities in Roatán's tourism industry.

## Chapter 4: The Crisis of Land Rights: Landlessness and Its Impact on Roatán's Ecology

*“Ten percent of the population holds 80 percent of the land. What you have in the country is an oligarchy, largely today an agricultural oligarchy. Landholding families . . . are in a position to exercise enormous influence not only over the military but over the political apparatus”* (Larry Birns, Hemispheric Affairs, as cited by Jeremy Relph (2014)).

*“Over the last three decades, the poverty generated by Honduras' unequal land distribution has been magnified by climate change and natural disasters, rising food prices and land grabs for corporate agribusiness and tourism development. While deepening both urban and rural vulnerability, these events also sparked new forms of grassroots organizing and political consciousness”* (Kerssen 2013, 97).

### Introduction

While the past two chapters have discussed Ladino mobilities in their physical, economic, and social forms, this chapter examines how the movement of Ladinos as *political bodies* shape island ecology. Honduras is currently undergoing a rapid consolidation of land ownership amongst an elite group of large-scale estate owners. Current estimates state that around seventy to eighty percent of Honduran farmers hold just ten percent of the land (mostly in small plots), while one percent of elite landowners hold twenty-five percent of the land (in massive estates) (Kerssen 2013). Ladino politics and identity have in large part been informed by the group's role in land redistribution efforts to ameliorate such inequality, and are tied to the Honduran land rights movement more generally (Kerssen 2013). This movement is historically rooted in mainland struggles against glaring inequality stemming from power arrangements put into place during the Colonial Era (Euraque 2003). While Roatán was largely not involved with



this history (Stonich 2000), I argue agrarian land rights politics are being brought to Roatán with Ladino migrants, shaping how they claim and use land on the island.

Honduran landlessness is also shaped by broader global trends contributing to wide-scale precarity, such as *land grabbing* in the global south. However, these connections are largely unrecognized in media, government, and stakeholder depictions of Ladino migration to Roatán, even though a number of stakeholders cite Ladino population growth as a contributing factor to Roatán's ecological decline. Migrant land use and claiming strategies are often glossed over simply as cultural differences in livelihoods or as stemming from ignorance about land management (e.g. USAID Report 2006). In contrast, I argue migrant land use and claiming strategies in Roatán are informed in part by the broader politics of land rights, and therefore politically significant.

My research shows the politics of land rights manifest in largely unrecognized ways in Roatán through migrant squatters who continue to claim land through historically legal methods (on the mainland) such as “cleaning” it (removing trees, shrubs, and other vegetation) and making it “productive” (planting crops). These methods gained legitimacy as a result of land redistribution policies on the Honduran mainland from the 1960s through the 1970s, yet are at odds with the island's distinct history regarding land ownership (which is based on a title system) as well as the current economic designation of Roatán as a “tourism free zone” (which encourages international land ownership and derides squatting as it has a negative impact on the confidence of investors). However, as Ladino migration to Roatán proliferates, squatters often succeed in claiming previously claimed or titled land through local power struggles, as the island's municipal

government has little authority to enforce laws. A consequence of migrant squatting has been significant environmental degradation in the neighborhood of La Colonia, as deforestation and sewage run-off have contributed to sedimentation and pollution of the waters in the island's marine protected area.

Stakeholders of the Sandy Bay watershed cited population growth in La Colonia as a major contributing factor to declining ecological quality of the marine protected area. Indeed, the island is facing unprecedented ecological decline as the population has soared. But Cliggett (2001) argues the concept carrying capacity (the idea that a given environment can support a specific number of people) is flawed as a scientific measure on several fronts. For example, it is difficult to measure food resources (not all edible foods are actually eaten, foods differ in caloric content, and different foods require different energy expenditures to harvest). The concept also does not address differences in standard of living nor food preferences. Further, carrying capacity assumes one group of humans relies on one singular, bounded territory from which carrying capacity could be measured. This overlooks the idea that multiple groups might use the same environment, and conversely, that multiple environments might be used by one group. Carrying capacity also assumes full use of resources within a given territory and that there is homogeneity across a landscape.

Despite these critiques, Cliggett (2001) argues carrying capacity is useful as a folk model to explain human observations about ecological change. She asserts the concept is appealing to many people because it presents a sort of "common sense" understanding of the relationships between finite natural resources and the human populations who use them. Similarly, stakeholder perceptions of environmental change in Roatán are useful in

that they highlight on-the-ground observations about the island's worsening environmental quality. However, the specific processes through which degradation is occurring are poorly understood.

Unruh, Cliggett and Hay (2005) argue past research pertaining to migrant population growth and the environment is often based on a straightforward assumption that increased population results in ecological decline. However, while much of this research has been valuable, "the body of literature lacks an examination of the precise mechanisms embedded within processes by which the arrival of migrants causes such change in their new location" (191). While increased population has the potential to pose threats to environmental quality, anthropological research on settlement growth and land use demonstrates that increased population does not automatically result in environmental degradation (Redman 2006). For example, contrary to popular belief, human occupation has been shown in some instances to result in greater biodiversity (Fratkin 1997).

It would be tempting to assume Ladino migrants exploit natural resources out of desperation and poverty. Yet, Lambin et al. (2001) warns that researchers should be careful not to simply link poverty to ecological decline, as this relationship is too simplistic to fully explain how land cover changes. Instead, economic opportunities, local institutions, access to technology, infrastructure, and social relationships are far more likely to shape human-environment relationships. Therefore, without further understanding of land use patterns, population alone explains very little about ecological degradation (Cliggett 2001).

In this vein, my research demonstrates the politics of land rights is an overlooked factor shaping how and why environmental destruction in Roatán occurs. While Ladino

land claiming practices in La Colonia pose environmental threats to the nearby coral reef, local stakeholders fail to acknowledge the role that political and historic underpinnings play in migrant land claiming and use – and by extension – overlook the nuanced relationships between population and environment on the island. Whether purposeful or not, stakeholder ignorance of the politics of land rights for poor Ladinos acts to further marginalize this group politically, social, and economically.

At a broader level of analysis, Ladino migration to Roatán is being prompted in part by widespread, growing landlessness, which has been shown to constrain both urban and rural livelihood options and contributes to pervasive poverty (Guereña and Burgos 2014). The uncertainty brought about by landlessness is shaped by Honduran historical particularities regarding land distribution, but also fits a broader global trend of land consolidation through land grabs. The flows of Ladino migrants to Roatán demonstrate why it is imperative in analyses of contemporary social movements to focus on peripheral and decentralized actors, as this case study shows some of the wide-reaching impacts of mainland land grabbing. In studies of land rights movements in particular, this chapter builds on the work of sociologist Wendy Wolford (2010) who shows it is important to focus on “counter-discourse” in analyses of social change and mobilization, in which people are “confused, life is complicated, emotional and uncertain” (25). Ladino land claiming in Roatán shows that political action can take a myriad of forms occurring in seemingly out of the way places, brought about through conflicting ideologies, yet innovative in its applications.

## Landlessness and Land Grabbing in Latin America and Beyond

Kerssen (2013) argues that shortly after the global economic crisis of 2008, there was growing consolidation of land ownership worldwide. This is primarily evidenced by large-scale land acquisitions, especially in the global South. Some of these land acquisitions occurred legally (through purchase) while others were coerced or taken through force. The term “land grab” has become a catchall phrase to refer to a “new global wave of peasant dispossessions” (Kerssen 2013, 2) that are driven more by the financial value of land and its resources than previous land consolidation trends that focused more on the production value of land (Kerssen 2013). This analysis dovetails with Sassen’s (2014) argument that we are experiencing growing global incidents of *expulsions* – removals of people from their lands – that are prompting elite accumulation through land dispossession. This trend is argued to be a new form of capitalist accumulation and a tool through which class power is consolidated on a global scale and is one important facet of contemporary precarity.

Although land grabbing is not necessarily a new phenomenon, Kerssen (2013) argues that a distinct feature of contemporary land grabs is their speculative nature, as they have played out in the midst of food, fuel, and financial crises. As a result, the power arrangements responsible for these land grabs are more complex than in the past (Sassen 2014). While growing landlessness is of global concern, Latin America in particular exhibits the world’s most unequal land distribution. This can be seen in the region’s Gini coefficient for land (scores range from 0 to 1, where 1 represents maximum inequality). The region as a whole scores 0.79, with South America scoring 0.85 and

Central America scoring 0.75. To put that into perspective, the Gini coefficient for land in Europe is .57, Africa is 0.56, and Asia is 0.55. In Latin America, the thirty-two richest people have the same amount of wealth as the poorest 300 million people, and the largest one percent of farms controls more than half of all agricultural lands (Guereña and Burgos 2014).

Landlessness in Latin America today is greater than in the past and thought to be a primary factor contributing to ongoing economic and social inequality. Landlessness is also cited as a major factor hindering the possibility of more equitable development efforts (Guereña and Burgos 2014). Current factors contributing to landlessness in the region include the consolidation of land for agricultural plantations (primarily for soya, palm oil, and sugar cane), timber plantations, mining, and oil extraction (Moloney 2016).

Yet, while many of the prominent conflicts over land in the region are characterized as stemming from shifting economic development activities (for example, damn construction and palm oil production in Honduras), Mollett (2016) warns that stressing the economic nature of land grabbing risks glossing over the historicity and scale of the issue. For example, she argues land grabbing in Latin America is far from new, and instead is an old phenomenon with roots in the Colonial Era. The contemporary inequalities in the region date back to the racial dynamics between colonizers and the colonized that characterized Latin America in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries (and today). As a result, Mollett (2016) argues land grabbing in the region cannot be fully understood in terms of economics but must also take racial dynamics into account. For example, she notes that Afro-indigenous and indigenous communities constitute the “poorest of the poor” in Latin America, and that the lands they occupy are

often portrayed as “empty” or “frontiers” and targeted for land grabs. She argues that the problem with analyzing contemporary land grabbing simply as a result of site-specific development projects is that it obscures the bigger picture of landlessness in the region and the historical pattern of racially based displacements. Therefore, the racial history of the region is a key factor in understanding contemporary land struggles in Honduras and beyond.

Another way to understand Latin American land grabbing is that it stems from class (not just racial) conflicts (Kerksen 2013), as poor Ladinos also experience landlessness along with indigenous and Afro-indigenous groups. Land redistribution efforts in the region are aimed at reducing stark inequality across racial divides as land ownership is closely tied to power, wealth, and status in the region. In Honduras specifically, an elite group of landowners generally controls the government and military, meaning unequal land distribution has wide-reaching impacts on the structures of inequality.

Although much Honduran poverty exists in rural agricultural areas, disproportionate land ownership is closely linked to urban inequality as well, as landless laborers increasingly flee rural areas in search of jobs in urban centers (Kerksen 2013). And while land grabbing in Honduras is not new, contemporary landlessness is exacerbating existing inequality. This is happening as a result of things such as climate change, natural disasters, rising food prices, and tourism development, which are contributing to intensifying forms of uncertainty in everyday life (Kerksen 2013).

Current studies of land grabbing have often focused on the role of foreign companies and governments in acquiring land. But these analyses have tended to

overlook the role of local elites and states in land grabs. These studies also focus primarily on large land transactions, with relatively less attention given to small acquisitions (Kerssen 2013). The land grabbing occurring in Honduras has not received much scholarly attention (Mollett 2016), yet provides unique insights into global land consolidation, as it does not comply with several aspects of this trend. For example, land consolidation in Honduras is happening mostly through hundreds of small incidents of land expulsions, enacted primarily by wealthy Hondurans. Unlike many other cases around the world, these evictions are not new, but rather result from deeply historical, ongoing conflicts between elite and non-elite landowners.

Therefore, an analysis of Honduran landlessness today provides a deeper understanding of the state of global land grabbing through a focus on small-scale seizures by local elites, but also demonstrates how the broader trend of land grabbing intersects with historically particular land politics. Past research on the relationships between land and tourism development have typically focused on the role of tourism in disrupting existing land tenure arrangements (Mollett 2016, for example). This chapter contributes unique insights to this discussion as it focuses on the ways in which the politics of land rights are fomenting new practices of land claiming and use in Roatán through decentralized political action. This serves as a way for marginalized Ladinos to mitigate the precarity they experience as a result of mainland land grabbing through newly occupied lands in Roatán, but also adds to the precarity of everyday life on the island through the ecological and economic impacts of migrant land claiming.



## The Honduran Land Rights Movement: Colonial Contact to Banana Heyday

To understand how Ladino land claiming in Roatán is shaped by the agrarian land rights movement, some attention towards history is warranted. The land that constitutes modern day Honduras was significantly depopulated between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries because of colonial expansion and conflict (with the Mosquito people of the north coast being one notable exception). During this time, Spanish colonizers attempted to unify Central America as one political entity. To do this, they established areas of consolidated governmental control (with major centers in modern-day Guatemala and Mexico) and used smaller, less powerful government outposts scattered throughout the region to maintain control (Woodward 1999). Honduras remained an area that was relatively isolated and mostly populated by dispersed indigenous groups and escaped black slaves from the wider Caribbean. The growth of the banana trade in the early 1800's was primarily responsible for repopulating the area, which also set into motion transformations in social relations, the economy, identities, and resource access (Kerssen 2013, Euraque 2003, Striffler and Moberg 2003, Bourgois 2003).

The growth of the banana trade fomented corporate control of lands, links with the U.S. economy, and social hierarchies based on one's position in the production process. However, the specific impacts of these trends on local social and cultural arrangements varied greatly by area. For example, while changes in the economy and subsequent land use patterns in other parts of Central America disrupted existing land tenure for many indigenous communities, this was generally not the case in Honduras due to two main factors. First, early colonial expansion killed many indigenous people in the

area and led to depopulation. Second, the remaining indigenous peoples of the area were not the primary labor pool from which the banana industry drew its labor, and therefore many kept their traditional subsistence strategies intact (Euraque 2003).

The workers of Honduras' banana industry were comprised of people from the interior regions of Central America who moved closer to the northern coastal area when banana production emerged, as well as former or escaped black slaves from other parts of the Caribbean who lived in the area. Honduras gained independence from Spain in 1821 and became an independent republic in 1838 (Marvin 2016). Between the 1860s and 1930s, efforts to define Honduras as a nation intensified, setting into motion tensions between Blacks and Ladinos. In general, the Black history of Honduras has often been erased while the Mayan and Mestizo histories exaggerated (Forster 2007). Those living in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa tended to downplay or misunderstand the role of blackness on the north coast of Honduras. The capital characterized the Afro-Honduran population as imported labor that arrived in the country during the 1910s – 1920s, but overlooked, for example, the arrival of Garifuna (mixed black and indigenous) people in the late 1700s and the long history of black identity in the area. By the 1920s, Honduran elites rejected claims of Honduran blackness and instead argued that Honduras was a country defined as a nation of mixed Spanish-Indian (Ladino) ancestry only. Discussions about Honduran identity have tended to delink the labor history of the northern coast of Honduras with the country's ethnic imaginary, and both historians and the Honduran government have tended to overlook the historical complexities of race in the country. As a result, the labor history of Honduras' north coast where the banana industry flourished is poorly understood (Euraque 2003).

While many historical particularities of this region are not well-known, general trends have been observed. Divisions of workers in the banana industry helped support racial as well as class hierarchies. Large corporations (such as the United Fruit Company) held a monopoly over land and the means of production, which was legitimized through relationships with the U.S. An elite Ladino ruling class that favored policies supporting big business also took hold. During this period, social and economic relationships continued to deepen, which disenfranchised most workers from land ownership. At this time, national elites also made sure black Hondurans were deprived of land and commercial opportunities. Euraque (2003) argues that the elite push for anti-black sentiment stemmed from a growing recognition of laborer dissatisfaction with working conditions and deepening inequality. He notes the discourse of racial exclusivity in Honduras was a powerful tool through which elites mobilized other Hondurans who were viewed as similar racially, but who were in fact significantly dissimilar in terms of class and status. This racial discourse provided a way to unify Honduran elites with Ladino landless laborers at the expense of black Hondurans. This also acted to solidify a Ladino identity in Honduras that generally glossed over differences in their indigenous heritage.

#### The Honduran Land Rights Movement: The Decline of the Banana Industry

Honduras' banana industry had become *the* staple industry for the nation by the early 1900s but reached its heyday in the 1950s (Reichman 2011). With the subsequent decline in the banana industry, the coffee industry rose in importance in the mountainous parts of the country. During the 1960s and 1970s, cotton production and cattle ranches boomed, requiring large amounts of land. This resulted in significant peasant

displacement in the southern part of the country. However, due to Honduras' low population density, most displaced peoples did not migrate internationally, but instead migrated internally to unused lands. Ackers (1998) notes that it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that the Honduran peasantry faced land shortages as a result of expanding export agriculture and cattle ranching. Displacements from these industries deepened rural poverty as poor Hondurans were pushed off of the best lands and forced to settle in less desirable mountainous areas (Kerssen 2013).

The success of the Cuban Revolution around this time had widespread impacts on Latin America and helped form a national dialogue about land redistribution in Honduras. As a result, the 1960s marked the start of significant land reforms and a push to redistribute land to the majority poor, which lasted through the 1970s. Between 1950-1970, nearly every country in Latin America participated in some kind of land redistribution program in an effort to modernize their economies (Wolford 2010). During this time, land reform became a hot political issue for both conservative and liberal politics. This placed the rural poor at the forefront of national discourses about natural resource control and often pitted peasants against corporate interests. Land reform soon became associated with "peasant radicalism and communism" (Wolford 2010, 73), a discourse that shaped global geo-politics as countries such as the United States aimed to eradicate communism. Agrarian rights then took on global, not just local or regional import. For example, in her work on a land rights movement in Brazil, Wolford (2010, 70) argues the "rise of an organized peasant movement in Brazil has paralleled the rise of so-called new revolutionary peasantry across the globe," creating a regional as well as global imagined community of agrarian populism.

A Honduran law that passed in 1961 encouraged the country's peasants and landless workers to "colonize" government-owned rainforest lands located on frontiers. This plan allowed large corporations to keep their enormous tracts of land in Honduras, while still appeasing calls for land redistribution. Those moving to the frontiers were allowed to claim state-owned lands if they cleared vegetation and made the lands productive through agricultural development. However, initial abandonment rates were high because clearing dense jungle in frontier areas proved to be very difficult work. In response, in 1971 the National Agrarian Institute (INA) of Honduras pushed for the creation of peasant cooperatives to address this problem. Cooperatives would allow settlers to receive support for developing land from the government through inputs, credit, and the building of infrastructure (Kerssen 2013). In 1974, Decree Law 170 was passed to ensure the success of these land reform efforts. The law limited the size of claimed lands and prohibited their sale. Instead, unused lands were required to be returned to the government for re-distribution to landless peasants. These efforts had a dramatic impact on land redistribution. For example, in the Aguán Valley of Honduras in particular (where hundreds of peasant farmers have recently been forcibly removed from their lands) 409,000 hectares were awarded to 60,000 families over three decades of agrarian reform. This constituted 12.3% of the total land area in Honduras (Kerssen 2013).

Because of concerted efforts towards land reform such as this, Honduras did not experience the same guerilla movements as neighboring countries (such as Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador) during the 1970s. However, by the 1980s, the country's population was growing and commercial agriculture spreading, creating unrest, as the

pressures for land use mounted and food prices soared (Kerssen 2013). The economic stagnation during this time resulted in what is characterized in Latin America as the “lost decade” as little economic progress was made. In response, Latin America as a region moved away from agricultural production towards industrialization. Maquiladoras proliferated in Honduras, facilitating a rural migration to urban centers (Reichman 2011). With this new economic paradigm, many countries (including Honduras) borrowed money from multi-lateral lending agencies and accumulated significant debt.

#### The Honduran Land Rights Movement: Neoliberalism and Conservation

By the 1990s, solutions were being sought for continued stagnation and growing debt. In response, neoliberal reforms and shock therapy were introduced, which ultimately continued to worsen the everyday lives of Hondurans who faced rising unemployment, increased poverty, and a reduction in state services (Anderson 2009). This period created economic conditions (such as privatization), which encouraged land consolidation and the undoing of much of the work towards land redistribution of the previous decades. For example, in 1992 the Agricultural Modernization Law (AML) resulted in a weakening of peasant cooperatives when it privatized collective landholdings (Kerssen 2013). Until that time, the sale of lands acquired through agrarian reform was prohibited, but with the passing of the AML, these lands were privatized and quickly sold piecemeal by cooperatives that were struggling to survive. As a result of increasing land consolidation such as this, activism surrounding land rights grew during this period.

Around this time, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced a dramatic rise in biodiversity conservation (Zimmerer and Carter 2002). This shift was aligned with a

neoliberal push towards the new “silver bullet” in economic growth – sustainable development – with a move away from a dependence on manufacturing. Biodiversity conservation often targeted lands held or occupied by Honduras’ indigenous communities, which spurred a movement linking land reform with struggles for indigenous rights (Anderson 2009; Dodds 1998). While most of the economic paradigms enacted since colonial times shifted land access in Honduras, these efforts mainly affected landless individuals working for wages and prompted internal migrations to meet labor demands. Yet the use of conservation as an economic development strategy (when coupled with tourism development) set into motion the disruption of long-standing land arrangements for indigenous groups on the north coast and Bay Islands who practiced subsistence fishing and agriculture (Dodds 1998; Mollett 2010; Stonich 2000). The rise in popularity of the indigenous land rights movement at this time came from the intersection of long-standing racial discrimination against indigenous groups by the Ladino majority, coupled with poor economic prospects. These factors, in combination with the devastation brought to Honduras by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, helped land reform once again become a heightened political rallying point for Honduras’ disenfranchised.

In addition to growing indigenous activism, several peasant groups also formed during the 1990s to address land distribution, such as the National Coordinating Council of Peasant Unions (COCOCH) and the Association of Central American Peasant Organizations for Cooperation and Development (ASOCODE). These groups distinguished themselves from past activists because unlike peasant groups of the 1970s and 1980s, these individuals used non-violent tactics such as changing legislation and

peacefully occupying land. For example, in the late 2000s, land rights activists succeeded in negotiating with the administration of then-president of Manuel Zelaya for land reforms. Government officials and land activists struck a deal on good faith, which resulted in the establishment of Decree Law 18-2008. The proposed law would have paved the way for granting legal titles to communities that had farmed their land for 10 years or more, signaling a major win for small farmers. However, the coup of President Zelaya in 2009 reversed this hard-fought progress when newly installed president Lobo overturned the law and declared it unlawful.

Today, land rights are aligned with contemporary leftist political campaigns meant to rally the country's poor majority and affect change in the midst of a government characterized by its alliances to big business. The removal of former president Manuel Zelaya is largely understood to be an attempt to keep the country's deeply unequal hierarchy linked to land and production in place (Di Iorio 2010). Although the politics surrounding Zelaya's removal are contested, many feel he was forced out of power because he was viewed as a threat to the Honduran ruling elite and power structure that was put in place during colonial times. Before his removal, he passed a measure to significantly raise the minimum wage in Honduras, which was viewed as important progress for the country's poor. He was perceived to shift positions from the more conservative platform he was elected on to the more leftist politics of redistribution of wealth and land, which was the impetus for his controversial removal.

#### The Honduran Land Rights Movement: The Case of Roatán

The history of land rights in Roatán does not fall neatly into indigenous nor Ladino movements. Unlike many black Hondurans on the nearby north coast of the



country, most black Islanders are not Garifuna (except for a small population). Therefore, black Islanders do not have special legal claims to the land like indigenous groups. Black and white Islanders are also not considered Ladino. This has made their struggles for claims to land difficult, as they lack a broader movement with which to align. However, similar to indigenous and Ladino Hondurans, unequal land access for Roatán's residents can be traced to the Colonial Era, starting with the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean. When slavery was legally abolished in the Caribbean in 1833, slaves could not actually move away from their former slave owners' homes for four years while they served an apprenticeship (Stonich 2000). Many white slave owners at that time realized they would be outnumbered by former slaves and feared what would happen when Blacks gained full freedom. Many used this grace period to flee their homes and resettle in other areas. Roatán became one place that white former slave owners settled. Several years later, many former black slaves moved to the island as well. In the gap between white and black settlement, whites obtained most of the island's best land and resources. This set into motion the historical basis for inequality (as related to land ownership) on the island.

While the island's population grew during this time, it remained fairly detached from mainland affairs over the next hundred years or so. However, the Latin American economic crisis of the 1980s fueled a shift away from bananas, coffee, and beef and focused the government's interest on the prospect of linking conservation with tourism development instead. Roatán became an explicit tool in the Honduran government's plan to foster tourism growth. As tourism has flourished over the years (as discussed in the

introduction), population growth and foreign investment have too, making land ownership a key issue.

Today, all land on Roatán is privately titled and unlike the mainland, the Honduran government does not own large tracts of unused lands. The difference in land claiming and ownership systems can be attributed to colonial conflicts that established the British as primary residents of the island (throughout a span of over 150 years of British-Spanish conflict leading up to the Wykes-Cruz treaty of 1859 that gave Honduras ownership of the island) (Stonich 2000). There is no historical precedent for squatting on Roatán, as the island was relatively isolated from mainland economics and politics during land reform measures.

While the Honduran constitution outlaws the foreign ownership of land throughout the country, Roatán was given special economic status in the 1990s as a “tourism free zone,” resulting in the allowance of foreigners to buy and own land on the island (Stonich 2000). The island and mainland already had distinct land ownership histories, but the allowance of the foreign purchase of land further complicates land ownership today. Many Islanders who assert ancestral claims to their land do not own formal titles. Relatively new titling companies and island elites have been known to sell untitled land to foreign investors, despite Islander claims of ownership. In fact, in an interview I conducted with ZOLITUR (Zona Libre Turística), the organization in charge of the island’s “tourism free zone”, I found out it is common for a single piece of property to officially list three owners on a title, leaving quarreling parties to fight for ownership. This has caused deep tensions between Islanders who make historic familial

claims to land, newly arrived migrant squatters, and foreigner investors attempting to purchase land on the island.

Ladino practices of claiming land through squatting harken back to land redistribution efforts of the 1960s and 1970s where clearing land and planting crops was a legitimate path towards land ownership. However, current attempts at squatting in Roatán are greatly disparaged, as local and national government officials want to present the island as a modern, safe place for investment with clear legal processes for land ownership. The Sandy Bay community, in particular, is a place on the island where conflicts over land between all three groups – Ladino migrants, island residents, and foreign investors – collide. While land ownership is an important issue throughout the entire island, the migrant neighborhood of La Colonia has received additional attention due to its proximity to the island's marine protected area and its detrimental impacts on its ecosystem quality because of rampant deforestation in the neighborhood. The politics of land claiming and use in La Colonia are complex and layered. Ladino claims to land are at odds with black and white Islanders' historic claims to land (which are often not formally titled and have often been delegitimized as international investors flock to the island). These claims also intersect with broader national, regional, and international efforts to secure agrarian land rights in the midst of growing land grabbing on a global scale.

#### Stakeholder Perceptions of Land Claiming and Use

To gain an understanding of the limited political organization of Ladino land rights activism in Roatán, I interviewed a government employee who works on issues of land management and ownership both in Roatán and on the mainland. Her understanding

of the issue is that there simply is not a big enough Ladino population on the island to warrant an organized group. I argue this is a key factor shaping political organization on the island, but that it is not just a matter of numbers, but also of shared history and sociality. For example, Ladinos on the island come from various places around the country, including both cities and the countryside. While Ladino migrants are often spoken about as a generalized group by the local government, they are a heterogeneous group with diverse backgrounds. At a broad scale of analysis, livelihoods in Honduras are all shaped to some degree by the high level of landlessness in the country, but many land rights efforts on the mainland are intensely local, based on disputes about specific land deals. As such, it was common for Ladino migrants I interviewed to report diminished social networks on the island. Their neighborhood was rapidly growing, and many migrants had limited interactions with their neighbors due to working long hours. These factors, set amid the backdrop of increasing violence targeting environmental and land activists in Honduras, likely fosters a situation where efforts to organize a land rights movement on the island are hindered.

Further adding to the obscurity of Ladino politics in Roatán, during my fieldwork I was struck by the fact that few stakeholders in Roatán seemed to connect land rights struggles occurring on the mainland with the boom in Ladino migration to the island. This was especially surprising in light of a flurry of news stories about poor Hondurans being forcibly removed from their lands throughout the country at this time. For example, in 2014 Al Jazeera published an article entitled, “Audit Slams World Bank” (Woodsome 2014). The article details how an internal World Bank investigation found that the bank violated its own social and environmental guidelines when it approved a

\$30 million loan to Miguel Facussé, a wealthy Honduran landowner and developer. Facussé was found responsible for the eviction and death of dozens of poor Honduran landowners and activists as a means to acquire Bank-funded lands for palm oil development. Further, the audit found that between 2010 and 2013, security forces hired by Facussé's development company murdered at least 102 people affiliated with the peasant land rights movement. Several other news outlets, including the *Associated Press* and *Slate*, featured similar stories around that time about battles over land between Honduran small farmers and wealthy landowners, with headlines such as "Honduran Seizures Raise Fear of Wider Conflicts" (Arce 2012) and "Honduras' Killing Fields: Violence is Spreading in this Lawless Land" (Relph 2014), signifying an emerging crisis associated with the land rights struggle as growing numbers of campesinos were forcibly removed from land.

Around the same time, people I spoke to in Roatán about the perceived causes of Ladino migration tended to generalize mainland conditions as undesirable due to crime, gangs, the drug trade, corruption, or the "bad" economy, but provided no mention specifically of land or land conflicts. Perceptions about Ladino migration could also be gleaned from how they were described by the local media at the time (and can also be viewed as an elaboration of the Ladino threat narrative discussed previously). For example, a story about deforestation by the *Bay Islands Voice* used the following descriptors when referring to migrants: "peasants", "squatters", "subsistence farmers", and/or "poor farmers". At worst, they were regarded as criminal "invaders" of the island and at best it was acknowledged they were just trying to "survive any way they can". Yet the article made no mention of ongoing consolidation of land ownership on the mainland

and the resulting conflicts and conditions that were pushing Ladinos to flee (Armstrong 2013).

Today, tension about conflicts over land between Ladino migrants and island residents continue to intensify, as can be seen in a photo that was posted to the Facebook pages of several residents of Roatán in 2016 that read: “No to the invasion of lands on the island of Roatán” and features what looks like Ladino farmers in cowboy hats and jeans, flooding unused land.



Figure 4.1: Photo posted by several Roatán residents to Facebook on 6/7/16.

Additionally, in a 2016 opinion piece from the website *Hola Roatán* entitled “Why Did the Problem of Land Usurpation Appear in Roatán?” (*Hola Roatán* 2016), the author aptly argues that squatting is a problem in Roatán because of overlapping and

conflicting legislation by the Honduran government regarding land. Indeed, many conflicts have arisen on the island due to differences in the use of land claiming models between Ladinos, Islanders and international investors (for example, Islanders typically make historical/familial claims to land. Ladinos tend to claim “unused” lands as part of the history of land redistribution efforts, at one time supported by the Honduran national government. And international investors rely on formal titles to purchase land). Despite these clear contradictions, the issue of squatting on Roatán was attributed to the island’s municipal government not having enough power to enforce the land title system on the island, with no mention of the root causes of these conflicts. Peasant evictions, inequality linked to land distribution, and the politics of land rights on the mainland were not included in the article. Instead, the article focused on the illegality of squatting on the island, as evidenced by the inclusion of a photo that seemed to target Ladino migrants, which reads “Usurping is a crime.”



Figure 4.2: Usurpar es Delito. From *Hola Roatán* (2016).

Portraying Ladino migrants simply as criminal invaders ignores the history of land rights struggles that paved the way for the legitimate use of squatting as a means to redistribute land throughout the country. It also overlooks the ongoing crimes committed against Ladinos as a result of contemporary expulsions from their lands and the bigger picture of how these expulsions fit into both a global trend towards land grabbing as well as replicates old patterns of exploitation born in the Colonial Era.

Around the time news broke of land expulsions on the mainland, Roatán's leading publication, the *Bay Islands Voice*, published an article entitled "What Happened to the Trees?: Squatters Slash and Burn Hillsides Above Roatán's Watering Place" (Armstrong 2016). The article describes a breaking point in local conflicts over land. While for many years Ladino squatters had settled in La Colonia and negatively impacted the ecological quality in the broader Sandy Bay community, recent settlement growth had breached fences on a mid-island ridge and deforestation had started to impact residents on the other side of the island. These residents had previously been protected from the immediate impacts of migrant squatting since runoff went downhill towards Sandy Bay. However, with the squatter breach of the ridge, runoff was now travelling down the other side of the mountain, contributing to sedimentation of streams that had long been used as a source of fresh water for island residents, colloquially referred to as Waterin' Place.





Figure 4.3: A bridge over Waterin' Place. A long-important source of freshwater for island residents. Photo by author.



Figure 4.4: Sparseness of Islander homes around Waterin' Place. However, Ladino squatting on the ridge of the nearby mountainside is contributing to sedimentation of the watershed. Photo by author.

The article continued to describe the conflicts emerging as a result of Ladino squatting, in part due to the difficulty of mediating these conflicts. For example, according to the article, the municipal government of Roatán does not have the authority to prosecute squatters directly. Instead, landowners must first file a *denuncia* with local authorities. The denuncia then gets passed on to a judge, who can order that action be taken by local police against squatters. In one incident described by the article, a landowner was successful in forcibly removing a squatter settlement on his land after going through this process, but the environmental damage had already been done. Trees had been cut and vegetation had been cleared. And there was no guarantee squatters would not move back to his land at a later date. In fact, during fieldwork, I heard of other incidents just like this where landowners went to the trouble of legally removing squatters, only to have new ones arrive soon after, creating a frustrating and seemingly never-ending cycle of land disputes. Since La Colonia is divided into numerous plots of titled land, all legal landowners would have to go through the same process of filing a denuncia and getting court approval to get law enforcement to act on squatting, which – at best – offers a piecemeal and slow path for action.

Even local environmental authorities have few options for recourse against squatters. In July 2013, a team comprised of the head of the environmental unit of Roatán's Municipal government, two conservation NGOs, and the corporation in charge of managing Roatán's tourism zoning (ZOLITUR), conducted a three-week field survey of La Colonia to document the environmental damage done by recent settlement growth and squatting (the same incident mentioned in the introductory chapter). They found extensive environmental damage as well as a number of violations of the law. Cutting

down trees without a permit is illegal in Roatán and violates the management plan for the National Marine Reserve. But the team was only able to send a report to authorities at the Honduran Central Government requesting that environmental violators be prosecuted, as the team had limited ability to take action themselves.

As a result of the difficulties many landowners and local authorities face in taking action against squatters, it is not uncommon for people to take matters into their own hands. An Islander woman whose family has owned land in Sandy Bay for many years described to me how exasperated they had become with trying to maintain land ownership. She said, for months, her parents would go through the same exhausting routine. They would wake up, survey their land, and without fail see new migrants trying to claim it. They would chase them off every way they could think of: shouting, with brooms, physical threats. But after a while they grew tired of fighting every single day. And it was becoming dangerous to do so, as they knew land altercations on the island could become deadly. The family decided to sell the land that had long been in their family to migrants at a very low price to end the fighting. This story is not unique, as many island residents have grown tired of the daily struggles for maintaining land ownership as well, and often end up giving up the fight or selling their land.

To further investigate stakeholder understandings of ecological degradation in La Colonia, I interviewed the two non-profit organizations that have authority to manage the marine protected area, the Bay Islands Marine Reserve (BIMR) and Roatán Conservation Organization (RCO) (both organizations have been given pseudonyms). According to BIMR, La Colonia poses a serious threat to the marine ecology of the island's conserved area as a result of deforestation. When it rains, vast amounts of soil, garbage and other

debris are washed from La Colonia into nearby streams, which then empty into the marine reserve below. This sedimentation is so significant that the waters in the area turn from clear to brown every time it rains. This sedimentation is choking the coral reef. The organization has set up three water monitoring sites where the Sandy Bay watershed empties into the ocean to monitor the situation. From preliminary test results, there seems to be dangerous amounts of fecal coliform in the waters nearby the coral reef as a result of insufficient infrastructure to deal with raw sewage in the neighborhood. These issues were confirmed by RCO, who explained in an interview "we have two main issues with the Colonia. First, they (migrants) cut down all the trees, and that's leading to sedimentation and erosion. Second, poaching. They poach everything. It's like a no-man's land up there."

Others reiterated the sentiment that the neighborhood was a lawless place with no order. In conversations with several island residents, I was actually laughed at when I said I was interested in investigating migrant perceptions of ecological management. One resident told me they cut down the trees because "They are ignorant. They don't know what they're doing." Another said, "They think trees are the enemy" and explained that while Islanders like to live amongst the trees and practice fishing to supplement livelihoods, mainland Ladinos prefer to live on treeless mountainsides and farm. And after a lengthy interview, a somewhat exasperated environmental engineer living on the island told me, "Look, you're giving it too much credit. Not that much thought goes into it." The local media echoed these sentiments.

The slew of news articles about land conflicts published while I was conducting fieldwork encouraged me to push deeper into understanding the politics of migrant land

use. But investigating land claiming and use in La Colonia was not an easy task due to the illegal and contentious nature of this issue. It is illegal island-wide to cut down trees without a permit. And it is common knowledge on the island that many living in La Colonia do not own the land they occupy. An informant told me that purchasing a fifty by fifty (ft.) piece of land would cost around 150,000 Lempiras (about \$7,500 USD). This would typically be paid in 2,000 Lempira monthly installments (around \$100 USD). As an average yearly income in Honduras is around \$2,000 - \$4,000 (World Bank 2016, CIA 2018), spending around half a yearly income on land would be a significant burden. Therefore, both land claiming, and use were sensitive subjects. In interviews with migrants, I used caution to respect the highly political nature of this topic, while also providing a space for migrants to express their own experiences with the issue. After some time, I was successful in gaining insights into the logic of migrant land use. Ironically, I found that it is precisely because of the illicit and political nature of land claiming and use that people put so much thought into it (despite common perceptions).

After a long period of building trust with a neighborhood resident named Marcus, he explained the process of squatting on land to me as follows: First, you start buying and gathering all the supplies you need to build a house. When you finally have all the supplies you need, you very quickly “clean” the land. “Cleaning” is a locally used term for cutting down trees and clearing brush from land to make it useable for building or planting. Cleaning takes a considerable amount of work in the dense jungle landscape on Roatán. So much work, in fact, that many residents use the practice of not cleaning their land to keep squatters at bay. Clean land is much more likely to be squatted on due to the reduced workload. And since La Colonia is located in a once sparsely populated

mountainous region of the island, most land in the area must be cleaned before a house can be built.

Once the land is clean, Marcus continued to tell me, you wait until nightfall, gather your friends and family, and build your house as quickly as you can. Because of this practice, many houses in the neighborhood are very poorly constructed and frequently fall over in strong winds or in mudslides. “But what if they catch you?” I asked. “Won’t you lose your house?”

He explained, “It’s harder for them to kick you off the land if you can get it built. If your house is already built and then they try to kick you off, they have to pay you for the value of your house and building materials.”

After some thought, he continued, “Oh, also...if you plant crops like bananas and they take your land from you, they have to pay you for the value of the trees.”

“Really?!” I asked with surprise, as I had never heard of such policies on the island. “Yeah, that’s what they say,” he said with a shrug, motioning towards the neighborhood.

Initially, I was very confused by this interview. At this time in my fieldwork I had somewhat limited knowledge of the land rights movement on the mainland, as I thought Roatán’s distinct history with land ownership was the primary history shaping land use on the island. However, after some research, I discovered the historical basis for some of these claims (discussed in depth earlier in this chapter), especially ideas about cleaning land and making it productive leading to ownership. From there, I started to work through the thought process of migrants and determined that essentially, cutting

down trees and planting crops is an economic insurance policy that supplements their limited resources. Migrating to Roatán from the mainland is a considerable economic burden for most migrants. When they finally make it to Roatán, they have little money with which to purchase land. In their view, squatting on land is a calculated risk. Making land productive through planting crops is a way to grow food to feed their families, but it is also a way to increase the chances that if they are kicked off the land, they might be able to sell or get compensated for the market value of the crops they are growing. Putting in the work to clear vegetation off titled lands is also a risk. If the owner goes through the complicated legal process to forcibly remove them, their labor might be lost. But if the owner does not know about the squatting or simply does not want to deal with the hassle of removing them, it is a successful livelihood strategy that aids their economic mobility.

Overall, migrants seemed keenly aware that island authorities struggled to obtain the manpower and resources to evenly enforce laws in the wake of the island's population explosion, while using historical ideas about land claiming as a sort of backup plan against eviction. As a result, an interesting contradiction emerged. Migrants seemed to know what they were doing was illegal (hence building houses at night), yet once they were established on claimed land they invoked decades-old legislation in an effort to increase the likelihood they could keep usurped lands. Notably, these practices seemed to occur not just in La Colonia, but on other parts of the island settled by migrants as well, posing serious threats to the island's ecological stability. Yet while the practice of migrant squatting is an island-wide problem, key stakeholders poorly understand it due to inattention towards contemporary and past land rights efforts in Honduras. Contrary to

common perceptions that deforestation in Roatán is a result of ecological ignorance or fear of trees, my research underscores how well-thought-out the processes of migrant land claiming are on the island.

## Discussion

Land grabbing and landlessness on the Honduran mainland are contributing factors to growing widespread precarity and uncertainty amongst both urban and rural Hondurans. One appealing option for landless Hondurans is to migrate to Roatán in search of a better life in the island's tourism industry. However, as the island's population has increased as a result of Ladino migration, so has environmental destruction. Migrant use of historical methods of land claiming are contributing factors to this destruction through deforestation and the clearing of vegetation. Yet few stakeholders seem to understand the political complexities surrounding land claiming and use amongst Ladino migrants, especially in regard to its intersections with the historic as well as current politics of land rights. This has resulted in a poor understanding of the links between population and environment on the island and limits stakeholder effectiveness in mitigating these factors.

Characterizing Ladinos as peasants or poor farmers glosses over their historic relationship with capitalist development. I argue an analysis of Ladino land claiming becomes more robust when Ladino migrants are portrayed not simply as criminal invaders, but instead as part of a long-standing social movement towards redistribution of land and class power in Honduras. Positioning peasants as political actors builds on work done by other social scientists such as Wendy Wolford (2010), who analyzes the politics of land rights movements in Brazil, arguing:



We cannot fully understand the importance of contemporary campaigns for land redistribution, food sovereignty, and sustainable small-scale agriculture without explaining why our theoretical frameworks have consistently suggested that the peasantry was dead, and that the struggle for land was a thing of the past. Peasants are – and have always been – Capital’s true subaltern, the “other” that both legitimated and enabled industrialization, colonization, and postwar development. Contemporary peasant political mobilization needs to be situated in historical conditions of production and social reproduction because peasants themselves are rooted in these conditions (70-71).

Wolford’s work contributes important insights both theoretically and methodologically to the study of social mobilization surrounding land. She indicates that in order to understand peasant social movements, their livelihood strategies must first be politicized as a product of capitalist development. Similarly, my research demonstrates the ways the Honduran peasantry, as a political concept, becomes obscured in Roatán through stakeholder misunderstandings of migrant land use. I argue the history and activism informing migrant land claiming should be acknowledged as a first step towards understanding their land use practices.

And although Ladino migrants on Roatán seem peripheral to the mainland land rights movement, Wolford argues the prototypical member of a movement should not be the only focus of analysis. Instead, analyses should be decentralized, with an acknowledgement of the messiness and shifting nature of movement affiliation. For example, in her work in Brazil, she does not limit her research to the group’s official discourse about its ideological tenets and goals. Instead, she focuses on the everyday negotiations and interactions between actors, and how conflicts arise over different perceptions about the values of land. She embraces the ambiguity and contradictions that arise through these processes. Ladino migrants settling in La Colonia offer similar

insights into social mobilization in Honduras, as these individuals are geographically peripheral to the mainland movement for land redistribution, yet their continued use of traditional methods for land claiming perpetuate ideas in line with the movement. Further, Wolford warns against static understandings of social action. For example, she notes that the meanings of actions taken by actors can change with time and be interpreted in new ways due to future events. In light of this, I do not want to overemphasize the political intentions of Ladino migrants and their land claiming practices. But my research does provide a snapshot of how migrants used their agency to claim land in a given moment in an effort to achieve greater economic stability.

The analytic challenge for researchers lies in how we interpret actions taken by actors, especially when those actions can be viewed both as acts of survival as well as political statements. Providing insights into this issue, Phillips (2015) examines the tensions that are at play through ideas and acts of resistance in his book, *Honduras in Dangerous Times: Resistance and Resilience*. He argues:

It is necessary to disabuse oneself of the idea that people guide their daily actions toward the actualization of fully developed ideals of societal change...daily life is pragmatic. How does one survive and make this here and now a bit easier or more secure?...Yet in some fashion people do construct and are guided by larger dreams and visions of what is right and good and how their society should function. The relationship between daily action and larger visions is an enduring concern of human inquiry (Phillips 2015, 7).

In Roatán, stakeholders of the Sandy Bay watershed tend to view the deforestation occurring in the area as stemming from both Ladino ignorance and as an effort towards survival while overlooking the political implications of migrant land claiming and use.

This example of land rights activism in La Colonia sheds light on how political action unfolds in Honduras, as past analyses have often failed to capture the tension between everyday acts of survival and larger efforts towards a politics of justice in Honduras. For example, anthropologist Adrienne Pine (2008) argues that many Hondurans feel they have little hope in improving their lives. Success is understood as based on merit and economic shortcomings are explained as stemming from a lack of ambition and ability. She says this is largely the result of the U.S. definition of success and its influence on Honduran culture and identity. In her work, she highlights the long-standing relationships Honduras has with the United States and the impact of what she calls the “achievement ideology” on Honduran identity formation. She argues:

State corruption, state-sanctioned worker exploitation, lack of access to education, and landlessness resulting from large-scale farming, dam-building projects, and other development schemes are forms of structural violence that lead Hondurans to fail in the quest to improve themselves through performing new identities. All too often, these experiences lead Hondurans to conceptualize themselves as living in a “culture of poverty” whereby they are doomed by their own poverty to be poor (Pine 2008, 14).

Pine argues that the adherence to the achievement ideology is in part due to the influence of the United States, but also a result of the normalization of poverty and lack of focus on bigger structural factors by Hondurans themselves. In my research I find evidence to the contrary. The long history of land rights efforts in Honduras, spanning from colonial times to today, demonstrates that many poor Hondurans understand a primary structural cause of their poverty: unequal land distribution.

The older members of Ladino families I spoke to typically had been farmers earlier in life, yet the younger members did not have this agricultural experience (and

instead had been employed in positions like nannies, housekeepers, or small business owners). This follows the general trends of land consolidation, increased landlessness, and the movement of rural residents to urban centers throughout Honduras. While Ladino migrants in Roatán do not seem to represent the typical land rights activist, this is in part due to the fact that Hondurans have been trying to mitigate forms of uncertainty for some time as landlessness has grown. The practice of squatting in Roatán can be viewed as migrants using their limited agency to combat some of the structural forces shaping their lives, which precipitate uncertainty. This shows the will to perform “new identities” and exercise inventive political action in light of the changing contours of precarity on the mainland as well as the island.

For example, mainland precarity is shaped by unequal land distribution, which has been exacerbated over the past 30 years by factors such as climate change, natural disasters, rising food prices, and land grabbing for corporate agribusiness and tourism development (Kerssen 2013). Combined, this confluence of factors points to a burgeoning crisis for the country’s majority poor and indicates the consequences of unequal land distribution are becoming less forgiving than in the past. In comparison, island precarity has been shaped by climate change and unprecedented ecological decline (coral reef bleaching as well as diminished fish populations), booming population growth, competition over jobs in the tourism industry, and fights over land claiming models. These factors also show the consequences of precarity in Roatán are becoming less forgiving than in the past. Ladino migration to (and subsequent squatting in) Roatán is a strategy through which mainland precarity is mitigated, but these actions in turn

contribute to new forms of precarity on the island through increased environmental pressures.

The complexities surrounding migrant land use in Roatán have been overlooked by an array of stakeholders in part due to Ladino political invisibility. This invisibility has led to the failure of stakeholders to critically examine the relationships between population growth and environmental conditions, leaving them ill equipped to mitigate unprecedented environmental destruction on the island. But the environmental and economic uncertainties arising from migrant land claiming are also overlooked as a result of the failure to link deforestation in Roatán to broader causes of precarity affecting the region (and globe) as a whole. At a broader level of analysis, the complexities of precarity, both on the mainland as well as island, point to the need for nuanced analyses of the wider factors shaping global precarity (such as land grabs and climate change) but also demands an examination of how these factors intersect with localized histories (such as the different land rights models on both Roatán and the mainland) in order to implement appropriate measure to mitigate such uncertainty. While the politics of land rights have been a defining factor shaping Ladino identities and livelihoods for generations, the next chapter explores how contemporary Honduran youth are striving to build meaning in their everyday lives as landlessness and violence increase. This discussion has been saved for the last chapter of this dissertation in an effort to emphasize the possibilities for the future generation of Hondurans to formulate new frameworks for hope and well-being in light of growing precarity.

## Chapter 5: The Crisis of Lost Childhood in Honduras: Violence and the “Good”

*“I had to walk to school alone every day and it was scary. If you are perceived as weak you will be a target. People will beat you up or kill you . . .*

*. . . And that’s what childhood is for – to learn how to be strong so you can survive as an adult. You have to learn not to be weak.”*

-- Antonio, a 14-year-old jewelry maker and beachside vendor in Roatán

### Introduction

One summer morning I woke up, made some coffee, and turned on the news as I typically did. The headlining story gave me pause. Many television stations in Roatán come from the United States, as did this particular newscast, and that day’s leading story was that the Texas/Mexico border was experiencing an unprecedented surge of unaccompanied minors from Central America. Most of these children came from Honduras, with the next two prevalent source countries being El Salvador and Guatemala (Main 2014). Astoundingly, nearly 68,000 children were apprehended trying to cross the southern U.S. border during that fiscal year (2014). This was nearly double the number of children apprehended the previous fiscal year (U.S. Customs and Border Patrol 2015). The situation was reported as an immediate and growing humanitarian crisis for the United States. Although undocumented emigration from Central America has been a significant political issue for some time in the United States, the 2014 crisis was distinct because it showed a dramatic increase in arrivals of children without guardians.

Hearing pundits, politicians, and activists debate what the fate of these children might be – while I watched from my bedroom in Roatán – felt surreal. Some of the island’s residents I saw most consistently were child vendors. They sold things like

sunglasses, jewelry, and bootlegged DVD's to tourists on the beaches of Roatán. The core issue being debated that day in the news was if these children were refugees or immigrants. Immigrants are defined as people who *choose* to migrate while refugees are defined as people who are *forced* to migrate. As a result, children's decision-making became a central issue in the dispute. Although I had observed and spoke with child vendors frequently over the course of my research, up to that point I had not given much thought to their abilities to exercise agency, especially regarding complex issues such as migration. I then started to consider more deeply the lived experiences of children in the region, wondering how they performed complex decision-making and what their strategies were for mitigating pervasive structures of violence in everyday life.

Numerous scholarly publications and news articles have brought to light the confluence of grim circumstances shaping the precarity children and youth in Latin America face, including: persistent poverty, the growing stronghold of gangs over daily life, the entrenchment of the drug trade, state corruption, and staggeringly high rates of murder and violence (Wolseth 2011; Biehl 2013; Pine 2008; Goldstein 2013; Sluka 2000). However, complex analyses of how the region's young make decisions under such structural constraints – especially as a way to attain a better life – are limited. A challenge for anthropological research on this topic lies in contextualizing children's decision making within culturally-specific settings of everyday life, without reducing them to mere victims – or categorically positioning them in what Robbins (2013) refers to as the “suffering slot”. He argues the “suffering slot” acts as a trope through which anthropological informants become “othered” and obscures deeper understandings of human action. In this chapter, I contribute to theoretical work being done towards “an

anthropology of the good” advocated by anthropologists such as Robbins (2013) and Appadurai (2013) who argue that a focus on human suffering without adequate attention towards “the good” misses important cultural insights, and Fischer (2014) who contends that notions of “the good life” provide anthropologists with a framework through which we can better interpret the actions of others. At the same time, I situate the broader forces shaping youth lives as part of regional patterns of precarity stemming from shifts in the Honduran economy and social structure. For example, while the flooding of the U.S. border by Central American children is a symptom of growing uncertainty in everyday life, Hondurans have identified this uncertainty more broadly as a perceived disappearance of childhood.

In this chapter, I examine how a Honduran youth navigates uncertainty to find well-being through Roatán’s tourism industry. I argue the negotiations he makes to secure both a livelihood and meaning in life cannot be divorced from broader issues of precarity in the region, but also that his formulation of a good life is inextricably local in nature, constituted through Roatán’s tourism industry. I use the case study of 14-year-old Antonio, a Ladino migrant from the Honduran mainland who sells jewelry to tourists on the beaches of Roatán. I first examine the ways mainland precarity (e.g. his early-life experiences with structural violence) led to his vulnerable position as a child vendor. I then demonstrate how his current career aspirations center on efforts to attain social and economic mobility (while navigating new forms of uncertainty in Roatán) as he transitions to adulthood. This case study provides a nuanced analysis of the everyday social and economic decisions young people in the region make, contextualizing the child refugee crisis of 2014 while also examining how regional uncertainty is locally mitigated.



The loss of childhood in Honduras is viewed as a serious social problem throughout the country. Although many factors contribute to the loss of childhood, Wolseth (2011) finds through his ethnographic research in Honduras that persistent forms of violence are thought to be its primary cause. Therefore, when Hondurans discuss anxieties over childhood it acts as a diagnostic for just how bad the infiltration of violence in everyday life has become. In his research, specifically with Honduran male youth, Wolseth (2011) examines the physical and social impacts of violence on their lives. He argues many young Hondurans are exposed to physical violence through the frequent deaths of those they know. They also experience violence in the form of their own “social deaths” due to limited future prospects. He explains social death as “the extinguishing of hope in a future, the contracting of social spaces for youths, the diminishing of opportunities for advancement, and the chronic disinvestment in youths as a consequence of state policies which, ultimately, criminalize poor young men” (2011, 314). Migration to the U.S. (like what was observed during the summer of 2014) can be viewed as one way regional youth cope with violence and attempt to build better lives. But what about those who stay behind? In Antonio’s case study, I find the structural violence he experienced as a child – the ongoing processes of violence experienced through societal arrangements – eroded his access to the social and economic capital that would help him live more securely. However, I argue his participation in Roatán’s tourism industry provides a way for him to mitigate these webs of structural violence, providing hope of a better life through his career aspirations.

In addition to social and humanitarian concerns over this topic, the crisis of lost childhood in Honduras has significant implications for the stability of tourism

development in Roatán. For example, the slashing of budgets for youth job training and education by the Honduran government has fomented an unskilled, destabilized workforce. The violence experienced by young male bodies comes to be, in part, the physical manifestation of neoliberal policies that have led to the erasure of youth education and training from the Honduran national budget. The disappearance of youth from public funding mirrors their disappearance from everyday life through social and physical deaths. This makes youth less likely to attain employment at resorts and scuba shops. The lack of future social and economic prospects for youth is fueling the spread of gang activity and other “antisocial” behavior (Wolseth 2011), which erodes international confidence in the safety of tourism in Honduras. Additionally, high levels of violence on the mainland are prompting Hondurans to flee not just to the U.S., but also to Roatán. While these conditions result in forms of social and infrastructural disintegration for sending communities, they also prompt the need for forms of reintegration in communities receiving migrants (Reichman 2011). This phenomenon can be seen in places such as the Sandy Bay Colonia, which has put increased demands on things such as housing, electricity, water, and sewage treatment, all of which are challenges in Roatán.

#### Background: The Intersections of Tourism and Childhood

As a general starting point, it is important to note that the concepts of childhood and youth are culturally designed. Their definitions vary across cultures and can also shift over time for any given culture (Wolseth and Babb 2008). According to the United Nations, children are classified as individuals younger than eighteen years of age with adulthood technically beginning at eighteen. The concept of youth is used to refer to the

transitional period that spans between childhood and adulthood when maturation occurs, generally considered to be from fifteen to twenty-four years of age. However, youth is a concept that is hard to define as a definitive age range because it is fluid. In this chapter, I draw on literature about both children and youth because they often overlap in discussions of labor, and distinctions are not always well elaborated in publications on the issue. For example, although adulthood does not begin until eighteen, the legal working age in Honduras is sixteen (although fourteen-year-olds are allowed to work if they still attend school). Those under the age of eighteen who work are limited to twenty hours per week. Therefore, in Honduras you could theoretically have a sixteen-year-old person legally employed (who could be defined as either a youth or child, depending on if the legal or social status was emphasized).

A focus on childhood and youth in Latin America is important because the region has historically been a place comprised of mostly young individuals. The region's young have been and continue to be important agents of social change. For example, student protests in the 1960s and 70s were integral in prompting broad societal and cultural changes in Latin America (Wolseth and Babb 2008). However, today in Honduras, the concept of youth is mostly associated with moral decline and fears over the future (Wolseth 2011). For example, concern has been expressed about who will continue rural agricultural activities with a generation of youth seemingly uninterested (McCune et al. 2017). Others argue youth feel a general sense of "placelessness" in the region as a result of disintegrating family life, which in turn, encourages some youth to migrate elsewhere (Roberts 2015).

While a number of children and youth are employed in tourism in Latin America, most studies of tourism economies overlook their importance in this industry (Small 2008). Additionally, Hodge and Little (2014) argue that while the topics of crime, violence, and security have received much attention in the scholarly literature on Latin America, insufficient research has been directed towards understanding how these topics intersect with tourism – one of the region’s primary economic drivers. As a result, an analysis that explores the relationships between youth, violence, and tourism offers important insights into regional economic development and stability. One reason children have been largely left out of analyses of tourism industries is that they are often not viewed as public actors, since “child labor is a morally loaded economic terrain” (Sinervo 2011, 89). Especially in tourist destinations where people are brought into intimate contact with children, the politics of child labor becomes more tangible. As a result, many tourist destinations make efforts to eradicate or discourage child vendors. The murky moral position children occupy in tourism industries speaks to the politics of childhood more broadly.

Offering a theoretical framework for this, Stephens (1995) argues that when children occupy positions outside culturally accepted notions of childhood, they become “people out of place” (her analysis builds on Mary Douglass’ well-known work on *dirt* as “matter out of place” in *Purity and Danger*, 2003 (originally 1966)). Stephens argues that as a result, there is a growing sense of children not only “at risk” in the world, but as “the risk” (11). Similarly, in Honduras, the fact that children are commonly both at risk of experiencing violence but also the perpetrators of violence, has contributed to the perceived disappearance of childhood (Wolseth 2011). Previous anthropological research

finds Honduran male youth mitigate social and physical violence through two main strategies – either by joining gangs or getting involved with local Christian churches (Wolseth 2011). My research investigates an additional way male Honduran youth cope with forms of violence and uncertainty – through involvement in Roatán’s tourism industry.

Past studies that have engaged with the topic of children in tourism have importantly shed light on the complexities involved in forging relationships between child workers and tourists. For example, Sinervo (2011) conducted a study of child vendors in Peru and explored how they negotiated and used the moral economy of childhood as a marketing technique to sell goods to tourists. Conversely, Huberman (2017) explores interactions between child vendors and tourists in India, but focuses on the motivations of tourists in purchasing goods. She highlights their desires for authenticity in their tourist experiences and the role child vendors play in those aspirations. My research focuses on a third dimension of the child vendor experience. I examine how children use their agency within structural constraints to make economic choices to foster a sense of well-being and strive to create social meaning for themselves (and subvert “social death”). My case study of Antonio demonstrates how the tourism industry in Roatán provides a social space through which he builds his identity as an artist, makes a living, and garners social and economic mobility.

#### Structural Violence and Child Labor in Latin America and the Caribbean

Structural violence is violence that emerges from broad societal arrangements. It is defined not simply as an act or acts of violence, but as *processes* of violence. I find this framework useful in understanding the role of violence in the lives of Central

American children and youth because it captures not just moments of violence in their lives, but the ongoing and deeply embedded forms of violence they endure and helps highlight components of regional precarity. For example, this framework helps reveal youth vulnerability through their positions in broader socio-economic systems (such as the erasure of youth educational funding under neoliberal reforms in Honduras). One form of structural violence experienced by children and youth in the region is their illegal, paid labor. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean an estimated 5.7 million working children do not meet the minimum age for legal employment (Child Labour in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPEC) 2016). For those children who do meet the legal age of employment, the region has approximately 156 million individuals who experience an unemployment rate three times higher than adults between the ages of 30 and 64. One-third of all youth are employed in the informal sector. These figures are significant because youth represent over twenty percent of the region's total population. Their bleak economic opportunities have a large impact on regional economic development and security. Additionally, deaths due to violence or homicide for youth in the region make up forty-three percent of total mortality for this group, with young men being especially vulnerable. And, in general, even though the region's youth of today are better educated than those of previous generations, they have less access to stable, good paying jobs while experiencing increasing exposure to violence (United Nations Youth Regional Overview: Latin America and the Caribbean 2016).

In Honduras, the gap between the country's elite and the majority poor is staggering. Approximately sixty five percent of Hondurans live below the poverty line and the average yearly income is estimated to be between \$2,000 - \$4,000 USD (World

Bank 2016, CIA 2018). The rich largely control the political system in the country, which is characterized by rampant corruption. Honduras has become a main thoroughfare for the shipment of illegal drugs from South America to the U.S. and gangs largely control Honduras' urban centers. To make matters worse, the judicial system usually fails to fairly prosecute those who break the law (Di Iorio 2010; Reichman 2011; Phillips 2015). And, as explained in the previous chapter, livelihood options have been made less secure in recent years, as some of the country's elite business developers have engaged in the forcible removal of small farmers from land (Woodsome 2014).

In light of these deeply entrenched structural inequalities, one might question why a focus on children's economic choices is relevant. While structural violence is imperative in understanding poverty and crime in the region, *how* and *why* people make economic choices under these constraints remain important factors in the analysis of economies (Chibnik 2011). Anthropological questioning is useful in that it illustrates the range of rationalities people employ when making economic choices. Furthermore, large-scale economic uncertainty is often reproduced through markets, exploitative labor relations, underemployment, or educational inequalities that hinder success (Menjívar 2011). Therefore, Antonio's everyday social and economic interactions with tourists helps provide a more robust picture of economic precarity in Honduras as well as the region more broadly.

### Antonio's Story

I met Antonio when he was fourteen – seven years into his career as a beachside vendor. He lived the first several years of his life in San Pedro Sula, the second largest city on the Honduran mainland. When he was around 6 years old, he got kicked out of

school, despite reportedly being a dedicated student and one of the smartest kids in his class. He recounted the story of how this happened to me one day while sipping a Coke on the beach and taking a break from selling his jewelry.

He said that one day after school when he was walking home, a boy from his class approached him. This boy told Antonio that he wanted him to take his upcoming exam for him so he would pass the class. Antonio refused to participate in the cheating, which angered the boy. After some yelling, the boy pulled out a screwdriver and tried to stab Antonio. Fortunately, Antonio was able to wrestle the screwdriver out of the boy's hand but ended up stabbing him in the stomach in self-defense. He narrowly escaped serious injury, but when his teacher heard about the incident, both Antonio and the boy that provoked him were suspended from school for a whole year. Breaking from the story for a moment, Antonio paused to explain to me with some sadness "When you are the smart kid, people think you are weak and they challenge you. But just because you are smart, it doesn't mean you are weak."

Without school to fill his days, his parents sent him to work in one of the city's large markets to sell produce. Antonio told me that in some ways, working in the market felt safer than going to school. He explained:

"I had to walk to school alone every day and it was scary. If you are perceived as weak you will be a target. People will beat you up or kill you. But in the market...all the adult vendors look out for the kids and treat them like they are their own children. It's like a big family...but once you aren't a kid anymore, then you are on your own. No one will look out for you." Then, after some thought, he continued, "And that's what



childhood is for. To learn how to be strong so you can survive as an adult. You have to learn not to be weak.”

But spending his time in the market instead of going to school did not shield him from all dangers. Walking alone to the market every day, he caught the eye of a local gang member, who forced him to learn how to be a pickpocket. He would coerce Antonio into stealing things from shoppers in the market, and Antonio was expected to give what he stole to the gang at the end of each day or he might face bodily harm. At this point in the story, Antonio got tears in his eyes and said he did not want to talk about his life in San Pedro Sula anymore. I told him that was not a problem, and we took a break. He soon picked up his story by simply telling me that soon after that time in his life, his family left the city to move to Roatán in hopes of a safer, better life.

Once on the island, Antonio tried to go back to school, but found it hard to fit in with the other kids. He was also behind on his studies from the year he had been suspended. And more importantly, his family desperately needed the income he could generate. He was sent to work in the tourism industry by his parents as a beachside vender. At the tender age of seven, his family depended on his jewelry sales for their livelihood. His father made jewelry at home and Antonio was sent out each day to sell what his father created. Each morning, he walked approximately thirty minutes from his family home to the island’s main road to catch a bus. He would take the bus fifteen minutes to the island’s primary tourism zone that had beaches, bars, and restaurants filled with tourists who he hoped would buy his goods. His typical work schedule was from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., Monday through Saturday. His father gave him Sundays off to rest.

Raised in a family that only spoke Spanish, Antonio quickly learned that to be successful he would have to learn English. And impressively, he used his long days on the beaches to learn English by chatting up tourists and restaurant owners. By the time I met him, he was fluent in English and had been for some years. This proved to be a huge advantage for him over other child vendors who mostly migrate from the Spanish-speaking mainland and have trouble building rapport with potential clients.

A few months into my research, Antonio and I became friends because we were often in the same places at the same times. I lived in the small tourist town where he worked. When I was conducting interviews or attending community meetings, I was usually hanging around the same beaches and restaurants where he was selling jewelry. We had a lot in common. We both usually walked around the neighborhood on foot, rather than in cars. And we were also intently watching and evaluating the world around us, instead of relaxing as most tourists do. I was analyzing the tourism industry for my research. He was analyzing the tourism industry to improve his sales skills. Eventually, when he saw me out at a restaurant or bar he would make a beeline towards me and join me at the table. I would often buy him a Coke or orange juice, and while he took a break he would tell me about his day. In turn, he would ask to borrow my cell phone to call his parents to report his earnings and to see if he had sold enough to be allowed to go back home for the day. On the days I was at home instead of at the beach, Antonio occasionally stopped by my house midday to have lunch with me and watch a little television before heading back out to sell.

One day while I was at home he knocked on my door unusually early. I let him in the house, and after some prodding about why he was not out selling, he giddily told me

about his recent windfall. He had been out at a popular beachside bar to sell his jewelry when he witnessed a local kid ridiculing an American tourist. The woman had just arrived via cruise ship and made her way to the little town where I lived to enjoy a day at the beach. But once she approached the bar, Antonio witnessed the kid make loud disparaging remarks about the woman's weight, publicly humiliating her in front of the other tourists. Being sensitive about his own weight (he was often referred to as *Gordo* by the other child vendors), Antonio came to the woman's defense and yelled his own string of insults back at the kid so everyone could hear. As many bullies do, the kid slunk off in shame after being confronted. The woman was so grateful, she approached Antonio and asked what he was selling. He showed her his jewelry. After just seconds of looking, she picked out a piece that cost \$5 and handed Antonio \$50, and told him to keep the change. I am not sure how much money he averaged on a typical day, but I know he was not allowed to go home until he covered his costs for the day. Antonio's jewelry was typically \$5 a piece, but he had more elaborate items that went up to \$20. He needed to sell at least one or two \$5 items to cover his bus fare and lunch costs for the day, so getting \$50 in one sale was huge. Elated, and ready to celebrate, he headed to my house for some well-deserved rest.

Once he set down his backpack and got settled at my house, he asked, "Can I borrow your phone?" I handed him my phone and soon overheard him talking to his mom. "Hola Ma. No te preocupas. Estoy bien" (Hi Mom. Don't worry about me. I'm fine). This is how he started every conversation with his mother when he was out selling. I had witnessed it several times, and it was almost like a script he spoke from. To my surprise, he went on to explain to his mother in a defeated voice that he had not sold

anything that day. He acted upset, and they both agreed that maybe business would pick up later that afternoon. This lie bought him some precious time to relax. He ended the call, and then as if flipping a switch, cheerfully asked me if he could make some fresh juice, motioning to the pile of limes sitting on my kitchen counter. I told him to go for it. He hand-squeezed a cup full of juice, diluted it with a little water, and then sweetened it with at least four heaping spoons of sugar. Once his juice was made, he asked if he could watch TV. I agreed, so he made his way to the couch, put his feet up, turned on the Cartoon Network, and in mere seconds was laughing hysterically. For the moment, life was good.

But minutes later, my cell phone rang. It was his father. He got my number from Antonio's mother since it was the last number Antonio called her from. This in and of itself was not too strange – he borrowed many people's cell phones throughout any given day to check in with his parents, update them on his sales, and essentially prove to them he was working. And it was not unheard of that his parents would call a number back looking for him. But after Antonio's report to his mother that he had not sold anything, his father decided to check up on him (as he often did) by driving around town. When his dad did not see him at any of his usual sales spots, he got suspicious and called the last number Antonio used to check in, which was mine. After mere seconds on the phone with his father, Antonio sullenly told me he had to go. He gathered his things, thanked me for the juice, and was gone.

The next day around noon I heard a knock on my front door. I answered, and it was Antonio. He seemed shaken. I asked how his day was and he said it was not good. He told me that as he was walking through a more remote part of town earlier that

morning, the boy who made fun of the cruise ship tourist the day before ambushed him. He must have been watching for Antonio that morning and waited until he was in an out-of-the-way area to confront him. He brought with him a very large, older boy. After exchanging a few words, the boy lunged at Antonio. The second boy joined in and Antonio got punched in the face.

It was then during his story that I noticed his lip was busted – swollen and slightly bleeding. Antonio managed to land a few punches on the other boys before a scuba instructor (who happened to be passing by at the right moment) broke up the fight and made sure they went their separate ways. Antonio came to my place soon after to lessen the risk of running into the boys again. Being a small island, Antonio knew that the boy he was fighting with lived in a community across the island (nearly an hour drive) and he told me he hoped the boy would not come back to the area where he worked. I asked him if he was ok and got him a piece of ice for his lip. “Oh, yeah. I’ll be fine,” he said. “I’ve been in lots of fights.” I guess the worried look on my face compelled him to explain, he continued, “I mean...it’s not like I *like* fighting. I actually hate it. I wish I didn’t have to do it. But sometimes, you just have to. You don’t have a choice. If I wouldn’t have fought him he would have thought I was weak.”

But the bodily harm Antonio experienced was not the only damage done. When the boys attacked him, he dropped his tray of jewelry to the ground, breaking several items. “My dad is going to be so mad” he told me. “But it’s not your fault!” I reasoned. “It doesn’t matter. All of this money is gone now. He’s going to be mad,” he insisted. “But can’t you tell him what happened? And that you got attacked?” I asked. “Yeah, but all he’ll say is that he’s glad I’m not weak and I didn’t back down from the fight. But he

will be mad about the broken jewelry,” he said. “Will your dad hurt you for losing the money?” I asked apprehensively. “Yeah, he might. He has before,” he said solemnly. Not only did he have a fat lip from fighting the boys, but it was also likely that his dad would punish him with violence when he got home for the loss of sales. He abruptly redirected our conversation by asking if he could watch television. I obliged.

Because Roatán is so small and Antonio is so well-known, word spread quickly of the boy from the other side of the island and what he had done to Antonio. I was relieved to hear through local gossip that night that many people had agreed to watch for the boy who initiated the fight and try to run him out of town. Hopeful that this would end the escalating feud, I went to bed that night optimistic that the kid would not return to the area.

But the next day around noon, Antonio once again stopped by my apartment for lunch. And this time, he seemed even more upset than the previous day. It turned out the boy had watched him come to my house the day before after their fight. And for the second day in a row, he ambushed him, but this time he waited for Antonio on the road to my house. As Antonio made his way towards my place, the boy jumped out in front of him. He was alone but this time he had a knife.

Antonio said to the boy, “Fine, you wanna fight? Let’s fight!” Little did the boy know, Antonio carries a large knife in his pocket at all times for protection. He pulled his knife out and flashed it at the boy, and upon realizing he was outmatched, the kid turned and ran away before things could progress. At that moment, Antonio heard a voice call out, “You’ve got some cojones (balls) kid!” Unbeknownst to Antonio, a middle-aged man watched the entire scene from the second story balcony of his nearby house. As

Antonio told me this part of the story, his eyes lit up and he giggled. I could tell he was very proud that he was perceived as ballsy and that he had won the fight.

But despite his accolades, Antonio was shaken by the incident and so was I. Having experienced very little violence in my life, and fearing for Antonio's safety, my brain went into overdrive trying to come up with ways to stop this escalating feud before real harm was done. "Can we tell the police? Maybe they would look out for you and try to find the boy?" I naively asked. "The police?! Uh . . . no. What are they gonna do? They won't do anything for me. And anyways, that's not how *my people* handle situations like this. We take care of it ourselves" he replied.

In trying to make sense of what he meant, my mind quickly raced to a story Antonio has told me some weeks earlier. A man who lived in his neighborhood received a payment to pass on to Antonio's father. But instead of paying his father, he pocketed the money. The man thought he did this without Antonio's father's knowledge. When Antonio's father realized what had happened, he called the man and invited him over to the family house for what the man thought was a friendly get-together. But when the man got there, Antonio's father confronted him about stealing his payment, and to make an example out of him, broke the man's arm while Antonio watched. This was meant as a punishment, but also a warning to others in the neighborhood not to steal from his family. When Antonio told me the story, a look of horror crept across my face, but Antonio shrugged and told me matter-of-factly, "Well...no one messes with our family now, because they know what will happen." Antonio was likely referring to this story when he said, "that's not how my people handle threats," and I understood that this was in large part because police were of little help to people in his socio-economic position.

Getting back to our discussion, I then asked him if he thought he could find a safer job. He pointed out that since he stopped going to school he would not earn a high school diploma, which meant the island's top resorts would not hire him. And like many mainland migrants, he did not know how to swim, so the chance of becoming a scuba instructor was nil. Then I remembered that there was a store on the island that sold only locally produced handicrafts to tourists. The mission of this store was to give local artists jobs and reduce the distance from producer to consumer. Their model seemed to be based on marketing techniques used with Fair Trade goods, as the store featured artist biographies and pictures, so tourists could "get to know" who made the art. This store was located just minutes from Antonio's house. And I figured that if he let them sell his goods, he would not have to be out on the beaches alone, risking violent conflict.

But my suggestion was soon met with disapproval. "I don't want to work there," Antonio told me plainly. "They don't let you design things how you want. And I want to be able to make my own jewelry." It turns out, the store had several design templates that artists were required to use to replicate already established patterns. Antonio continued, "I don't want to sell what everyone else is selling. I like to design my own jewelry and be an artist." I had not realized until this moment the extent to which controlling the design of his jewelry was wrapped up in his identity and that he considered himself an artist.

Next, I asked if he wanted me to try to get him a job at the cruise ship dock where I worked. It was a very safe facility protected with armed guards and required identification to enter. The conversation unfolded as follows:

Antonio: "Mmm...how much do you make there?"



Me: "\$20 a day."

At this point, his somber face broke into uncontrollable giggles.

Antonio: "That's all *you* make! *You* only make \$20 a day?" laughing.

Given my status as a U.S. citizen, who owned a laptop, cell phone, and other markers of wealth, it was understandable that he thought I made more. After what seemed like minutes of uproarious laughter, he got down to the economics of the matter.

Antonio: "But it's a long way to the cruise ship from here. You would have to take a taxi to get there" he reasoned.

Me: "Yeah, I do take a taxi. And it's expensive. I pay \$8 round-trip just to get to the cruise ship dock and back."

Antonio: "So you make \$12 a day!?" he exclaimed in disbelief. "That's like nothing. Why would you even do that? You are working for nothing!"

Me: "Yeah, I know...but it's good for my research because I get to meet people" I said with a shrug and some embarrassment at the transparency of my privileged position.

Antonio responded simply with a sharp look and raised eyebrows – which told me he thought I was either crazy, or an idiot. Or maybe a little of both. I was glad I had not admitted to him that I spent \$5 a day on lunch (as many other cruise ship employees did), \$3.50 on my morning coffee at the nearby café, and \$1.50 on my afternoon coconut oatmeal cookie that I had grown so fond of. Even though I brought from home with me a thirty-two ounce bottle of water every day, standing in the intense heat (often for ten hours at a time) meant I would need to buy a few more bottles of water each day to stave

off dehydration. So, at the end of most days, I was lucky to break even. But for many of the island's residents, this is the best work they can find. They do not have the privilege I had of going to work for the mere purpose of meeting people and observing the tourism industry. And they do not have access to grants or student loans like I did in order to meet basic living costs while conducting my research. Astoundingly, even at his young age, Antonio has the economic sophistication to understand that wages earned from working at the cruise ship dock were not enough for one person to live off of, let alone an entire family (whom he worked to support). I agreed with him that working at the cruise ship dock would not be a better economic move for him, although it would be safer.

I wracked my brain to think of how I still might be able to help him create a safer livelihood. "Hmm...ok...well what about coffee? I think the island really needs a local coffee roaster. I bet if you roasted it here tourists would buy it. And I roast it at home in the US, so I could teach you how," I offered. A few years ago, I purchased my own small coffee roaster and have taken up coffee roasting as a hobby. I figured I could teach him what I had learned. This suggestion was met with a quick rebuttal. "I already know how to roast coffee," Antonio told me with an eye roll. "You do?!" I asked with naïve surprise. "Yeah, my *grandparents* worked in coffee. Lots of my family worked in coffee on the mainland. So I've roasted it at home before. All you need is a skillet and a fire." At this point, I felt a little embarrassed to admit I had paid hundreds of dollars for my coffee roaster. In stark contrast to my perception that small-batch, home roasted coffee is the height of coffee modernity, Antonio viewed the coffee industry as antiquated, old-timey, and what his *grandparents* did – the dread of every fourteen-year-old.

The more we talked, the clearer it became he had already thought through his economic options carefully, and he viewed selling jewelry on the beach as his best one. He was essentially his own boss. On good days he made substantially more money than he could earn at places like the cruise ship dock. He took pride in his designs and abilities as an artist. And he was forging his own way (not doing what his grandparents had done).

It was then I remembered a conversation Antonio and I had had some weeks back that made me better understand how he found a sense of well-being through his identity as a beachside vendor. One day, I was showing Antonio photos on my laptop that I had taken around the island. He stopped me at a photo of a young girl, who looked to be about his age. “I like her,” he told me. “Oh really?!” I replied with surprise at his admission. He nodded and asked where I took the photo. I told him I had taken the photo while doing volunteer work at a nearby school with a local NGO. The school is in La Colonia. It did not dawn on me until then that the school kids I spent the afternoon with were the same kids Antonio had gone to school with until he dropped out to become a full-time vendor. These were his peers. Looking back at the photo, he told me, “I like her because she’s not embarrassed to sell things. Her mom makes her sell fruit on the side of the road before school starts, but she’s never embarrassed about it.” It was then I realized that being a child vendor was a potential source of embarrassment for Antonio. Without thinking, I blurted out “Oh, is it embarrassing to sell things?” I guess I had never considered it, although I should have. “Well...yeah!” he replied with a sigh.

It started to make more sense why Antonio was so intent on being an artist, not just a vendor. The structural forms of violence that forced him to drop out of school

threatened the sort of “social death” observed by Wolseth (2011) amongst Honduran male youth on the mainland. While structural violence shrinks social spaces for youth in the country, Antonio’s engagement with Roatán’s tourism industry opened a space for him to reestablish a social identity. His focus on craftsmanship in his work gave him hope for social mobility and the potential to avoid social death. Although the structural violence he endured presented many challenges for him in building social and economic capital, his career enabled him to work towards finding a sense of hope and well-being amidst greatly constrained economic options and persistent violence.

#### Discussion: Precarity, Violence and the “Good”

While violence and well-being seem to be opposing forces, this chapter focuses on the relationships between these topics to offer important insights about the interplays between structural forces and the lived experiences of those constraints during childhood in Honduras. Fischer (2014) argues in his book, *The Good Life: Aspiration, Dignity, and the Anthropology of Wellbeing*:

Notions of the good life orient the aspirations of agency and provide a dynamic framework with which to interpret one’s own actions and those of others, all the while bound by the realm of what is seen as possible. The market is a key venue through which to pursue the good life (6).

Importantly, Fischer argues that through conceptions of the good, agency can be made apparent. This is an important way to augment analyses of suffering, such as what is being experienced by youth in Central America. Further, Fischer argues that studies of happiness have shown that while income plays an important role in well-being, income alone is not enough. Instead, people who feel they have some agency and control over

their lives tend to be happier.

This sentiment is echoed by de L’Estoile (2014), who argues not only is money not the primary concern in many people’s lives, but that a research focus of the economy itself constitutes an exercise in privilege. For example, many people around the world who survive through the informal economy do not engage with an economic system in the same way those do in the first world. Further, she argues that using the “economy” as an assumed frame of reference can be a mistake because it establishes a discrete separation between economic activities and personal relationships. She argues:

Naturalizing the use of economic categories as a privileged tool to understand the world has been binding anthropological imagination in a straightjacket, blinding us to alternative understanding. In order to “rethinking the economy,” we should, at least as a temporary experiment, suspend our use of the language of economics and *the economy* (572).

Accordingly, throughout the case study of Antonio, I strive to use a framework that examines the links between violence and well-being that helps blurs the lines between his economic and social choices. Strengthening this sentiment, Goldstein (2013) argues that laughter plays an important role in the lives of her informants in mitigating tragedy in the shantytowns of Brazil. She argues that her analysis of laughter is essentially about power relations, and how the poor experience inequality in their everyday lives. She states:

humor is a vehicle for expressing sentiments that are difficult to communicate publicly or that point to areas of discontent in social life. The meanings behind laughter reveal both the cracks in the system and the masked and more subtle ways power is challenged (5).

Similarly, my focus on how Antonio finds well-being and career aspirations in the midst of continual violence provides a window into how he resists power arrangements shaping his life. In light of these arguments, the politics of childhood proves to be a useful analytic tool that encompasses a wide range of human activities and suffering, showing the often-inextricable links between “economic” and “social” acts.

At a broader level, since childhood is a concept that is culturally constructed, a perceived loss of childhood acts as a valuable indicator of how a larger cultural group or region views their current economic and social conditions. In this case, the growing prevalence of violence in everyday life for Honduran youth is exacerbated by broader shifts in capitalism affecting the Honduran economy (neoliberal reforms slashing youth education and training). Although the 2014 refugee crisis mostly affected a handful of countries, linking this event to the broader crisis of disappearing childhood in Latin America and the Caribbean offers a diagnostic for the region more generally as it relates to global capitalism. Antonio’s early life and subsequent economic choices illuminates much about the subjective experiences of the broader structural factors that prompted the child refugee crisis of 2014, especially how violence experienced by the region’s young is filtered through site-specific rationalities (such as Antonio’s livelihood choices in Roatán’s tourism industry). While previous research finds Honduran youth use involvement in either gangs or Christianity to mitigate social death, my research shows that tourism also provides avenues for youth to build social meaning.

An examination of choice and well-being in Honduran childhood is necessary for a more nuanced understanding of how and why structural factors fomenting precarity work in concert to produce extreme rates of violence that disproportionately impact the

region's young. To really appreciate the degree to which social and economic systems work to disadvantage youth, the agency they use to make economic choices must be considered because it reveals the true extent to which their lives are constrained. In the case of Antonio, his socio-economic position as a child vendor and artist can be understood as a result of both his experiences with structural violence as well as his own ideas about how to achieve well-being and a sense of hope. The structural violence experienced by Antonio and other Honduran youth has reshaped social and economic life in ways that normalize violence for this group. They are presented with limited economic options for staving off the violence of social death, yet engagement with tourism shows to be one potentially positive source of identity for the country's young. Therefore, childhood, from the vantage point of a young person such as Antonio, offers valuable insights about how broader sources of precarity operate in daily life and how they might also be subverted.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

*“You can eat chicken in danger on the mainland,  
or you can eat beans and rice in safety on the island.”*

- Ladino Taxi Driver

Ferguson (2015) offers important insights for anthropologists trying to make sense of contemporary forms of precarity. He argues a failure to acknowledge the cracks in the contemporary capitalist system is reflected in the limited political vocabulary used to talk about the issue. For example, in his recent book, *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution*, Ferguson acknowledges the failures of the “global development project” but challenges anthropologists to create a new language, a new vision, and a new framework to talk about the world. He underscores the fact that while development has touched nearly every corner of the world, there is relatively little to show for these efforts except a stream of failed projects that have not delivered jobs to those in need.

Ferguson critiques linear notions of development that assume that development projects will bring an abundance of wage labor. To the contrary, he argues that while capitalism has generated vast amounts of wealth, the unequal distribution of this wealth has created a world where wage labor is not available for the majority poor. Because of this, he argues we need a radical reimagining of how to address global poverty.

A primary reason for the difficulty in creating this new imaginary, Ferguson argues, is that it has long been assumed by a vast array of actors around the world that as poor, rural people move away from a life of subsistence agriculture they will enter into a



system that provides them wage labor through economic development, modernization, and industrialization. Wages earned would then allow for new forms of consumption and further increase development. But as development efforts have proliferated since WWII, the unfortunate reality is that development projects have primarily not fostered this smooth transition. He argues, for example, that politics could focus on things such as a more equitable global *distribution* of resources, instead of language centering on *production* and *consumption*.

In a similar vein, Tania Li (2007) argues in her book, *Land's End*, that:

For too long, important political debates have been foreclosed by transition narratives that posit an apparently natural evolution in which farming becomes more efficient and exclusive, and people whose labor is not needed on the land move into other sectors of the economy. My findings challenge notions of agrarian transition as a teleological unfolding. They also counter understandings of capitalism as a totalizing system in which – for better or worse – everyone will eventually be incorporated (4).

So how can we examine contemporary cultural landscapes in a way that de-essentializes linear concepts of progress and modernity? Gastón Gordillo (2014) offers a useful framework to explore people and things that do not fit into dominant discourses of progress. In his book, *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction*, he explores the concept of *rubble* to illuminate how silencing vestiges of the past helps us shape the world into “geographies of the present” (2014, 11). He explains that *ruins* are old places with significance and recognizable form, while *rubble* are symbolically or materially formless remains that hold little or negative value. Gordillo notes that our world is filled with rubble, but hegemonic narratives often render rubble invisible. He argues that focusing

on rubble can be a productive lens through which *place* is explored. This can be accomplished by focusing on *processes of ruination* instead of ruins themselves.

An example of place-making processes, as formed through the use of dominant narratives of progress as well as through the conceptual use of *rubble*, can be found in Roatán. For example, take the different treatment of two ethnic groups living on the island: Garifuna and Ladinos. The vignette that starts the introduction to this dissertation, written by the Honduran National Chamber of Tourism, which describes the island's idyllic tourism industry, mentions that a visitor can "share with Garifunas" when they visit Roatán. The Garifuna people are a small but established indigenous group living in Roatán (as well as other parts of Central America). They are a celebrated feature of the island's tourist landscape. They have an exhibit dedicated to them at one of Roatán's cruise ship docks. Visitors to the island can book tours to see traditional dances or eat traditional Garifuna food in a highly staged village setting. And afterwards they can buy handicrafts made from Garifuna women. While the Garifuna represent "ruins" in the tourism industry – that is, idealized vestiges of an era considered long gone – Ladino migrants are not portrayed as part of this archetypical landscape. Instead, they are framed as threats to the tourist imaginary, as portrayed by the Ladino threat narrative. They are, in essence, "rubble" – inconvenient reminders of Honduras' changing agrarian landscape and economic instability. They are the product of an incomplete economic transformation.

Adding to this discussion, Trouillot (1995) argues dominant narratives about progress produce silences where integration into global markets is incomplete – and in these silences meaning can be found. Similarly, I find silences about precarity in

Roatán's tourism industry, as well as the broader causes of that precarity, not only exist but have very real material consequences for island residents.

For example, since the murder of Norwegian Cruise Lines chef Jacob Gaban (discussed in the opening pages of this dissertation), confidence in the island's cruise ship tourism has steadily recovered. The 2014 - 2015 cruise season, which spanned October to April, saw a 42% increase over the previous year. Honduran tourism minister Emilio Silvestri assured that "the positive growth is related to the security environment in Roatán." And in total, an estimated 672,713 people visited Roatán via cruise ship during the 2014 - 2015 season (Central America Data, April 2015). This number has continued to grow, with over 1 million cruise ship passengers arriving in Roatán in 2017 (Taylor 2018).

To build on this momentum and boost the direct impact of growing cruise ship tourism, the island's mayor proposed an added fee of \$.50 per cruise ship passenger (currently the fee is \$1.50, so the additional fee would total \$2.00 per person) at the start of 2016. This proposed fee would go into a special scholarship fund for poor island youth, so they could attend college on the mainland. This fund is desperately needed.

But this proposal was poorly received by the cruise ship industry, which quickly rejected the plan. The Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association sent a very strongly worded letter to Honduras' Minister of Tourism about their disdain of the proposal. The letter warns:

. . . we express our grave concern over the proposed \$2.00 per passenger increase  
. . . Though Roatán has made great strides to significantly increase its passengers,  
these passenger numbers are **NEVER GUARANTEED**.

Regardless of a destination's beauty and products, cruise lines must make decisions based on financial soundness, and cost increases like the one proposed seriously jeopardize reversing all of your momentum and reducing calls. . .

We urge your support in expressing to the local Municipality Authorities of the Island of Roatán, to seriously consider the proposed cost increase and question if raising costs is worth LOSING PASSENGERS, which would likely result in a lower net revenue in this action.

Please also know that we remain at your disposal to discuss ways to increase passenger and crew spending so you can see true net revenue growth.

Roatán's mayor quickly yielded to the cruise industry's threats and rescinded the proposed \$.50 increase in late January 2016. But under what rationale was the island coerced into doing such a thing? The letter states that instead of the proposed fee, "true net revenue growth" should be garnered from increasing passenger and crew spending while in port. This suggestion seems ludicrous in light of the recent murder of Jacob Gaban in 2014 – a man who fits the exact demographic referred to by the cruise industry as the potential source of economic growth. Essentially, the industry is sending the message that revenues should come from tourist spending, and not affect the cruise industry's bottom line. But tourist safety is a serious issue on the island that needs attention, and the unfortunate reality is that many Islanders endure unstable and inadequate livelihoods within the tourism industry and are unable to contribute financially to island security. The local municipal government is also in desperate need of additional funds to improve island security and infrastructure. Without the cruise industry attending to this reality, the island has been put in a paradoxical position: they have been told that in order to increase revenue they need to facilitate tourist and crew spending in port --- but without money to improve island security and infrastructure

(which could be helped through increased passenger fees) they are unlikely to accomplish this.

Even if the municipal government of Roatán disagreed with cruise industry rationale, they have very little ability to fight their decision. The island has two cruise ship facilities, which pose different challenges to the municipal government. The facility that was most affected by the cruise industry's decision to reject the proposed fee increase was the oldest facility on the island, named Town Center in Coxen Hole. The municipal government owns this facility and (as explained earlier) they currently receive a payment of \$1.50 per cruise ship passenger visiting the island. The proposed 50-cent raise would have brought the per-passenger total to \$2.00. And while the letter demonstrated the lack of power local authorities have over the terms of agreement with the cruise industry, their ability to control the second facility is even worse.

The other facility is named Mahogany Bay and is located near the town of French Harbor and owned by Carnival Cruise Lines. Carnival Cruise Lines (who paid to construct Mahogany Bay in 2009) has created a beautiful, industry-leading facility. But they have refused to pay the \$1.50 per-passenger fee to the municipality. Instead, they pay close to a staggering *\$125,000 per month* to a local politician and businessman who owns the land where the facility was built. So, although hundreds of thousands of cruise ship visitors enter Roatán through Mahogany Bay per season, the municipal government receives no per-passenger fee for these visitors.

The failure to acknowledge the broader sources of precarity in island tourism (such as the lack of local control over the terms of development), along with the silencing of “rubble” (e.g. Ladino land rights history) produced through tourism development, have

stifled the space through which varied political discourses about the industry's failures might flourish. Unlike Ramirez's capture – which made headway towards stabilizing tourism through the perception of improved security – the rejection of the proposed fee demonstrates the continued precarity of the tourism industry as a result of the lack of power local authorities have over tourism development, and the fact that they are competing with other beach destinations in the region. This situation is a prime example of *why* and *how* tourism often fails to significantly improve the lives of those living in host communities. Roatán has assumed the risks associated with policing and monitoring its own people in the name of island security, yet receives proportionately few rewards, and lacks power to negotiate the terms of tourism development.

Anyone familiar with the anthropological literature on tourism development would likely say that Roatán's predicament is not unique. Past research has shown that host populations often experience a range of problems with tourism development such as social and economic marginalization, exclusion from natural resources, and diminished livelihood options (Gmelch 2003; Hall 2003; Lea 1988; Crick 1989). However, rather than simply replicating past studies that have investigated tourism, measured its impacts, and ultimately suggested better practices, I here propose it is helpful to critically examine the assumptions behind the narratives framing the industry, its problems, and suggested solutions. Essentially, it is powerful to implement a reorientation in how we frame tourism and its impacts, because, as demonstrated, narratives about progress and crisis play consequential rolls in how problems are defined and subsequent action is taken to address economic and environmental uncertainties, as can be seen in the aftermath of the murder of Jacob Gaban.

## Applied Dimensions of This Research

While I feel it is imperative to think through the applied aspects of my research, I must also warn that the precarity of life in Roatán greatly hinders the timelines of specific, actionable suggestions. Since I conducted dissertation research, Roatán's mayor, Dorn Ebanks, has served his four-year term and a new mayor has been elected. Who knows what kind of security plan, if any, the new mayor might formulate? Yet, while some of the specifics of my research might not remain applicable, I feel it is unlikely the ladino threat narrative will disappear any time soon as an explanatory model for tourism instability on the island due to its long-standing history and current popularity. Also, given Honduras' general trend towards militarization (in line with much of the rest of Central America and backed by powerful, wealthy countries such as the U.S.), any future security efforts will likely be based on similar forms of surveillance put forth by Mayor Ebanks. Therefore, I remain optimistic that many of my recommendations will remain useful.

Roatán's precarious tourism industry is often framed as stemming from an ecological crisis, namely, that the island has surpassed its carrying capacity due to (mostly Ladino) population growth. The precarity, in fact, results from overlapping political and economic crises playing out across multiple scales. These crises are shaped by conditions on the Honduran mainland such as: agrarian land expulsions in rural areas; astoundingly high rates of violence; growing gang control over daily life; the proliferation of the drug trade in the region; the slashing of funds for youth job training and education; corruption in the judicial system; increased militarization; unprecedented numbers of refugees fleeing to the United States; climate change; and diminished

livelihood options. Taken together, these factors show that the instability of tourism in Roatán is shaped by complex power arrangements that encompass more than just a growing Ladino population on the island.

Based on my research and analysis, I find the following points for applied applications: First, stakeholders of Roatán's tourism industry should abandon the Ladino threat narrative as an explanatory cause for precarity in the industry. Greater efforts should be made to grant Ladinos in Roatán political and physical visibility on the island. This should include things like identifying the neighborhood of La Colonia on tourist maps of the island. It should also include more active governmental involvement in the planning of infrastructure and development of the community.

Second, Roatán's municipal government, as well as the local media, should recognize Ladino squatting in Roatán as an extension of the land rights movement on the mainland and frame these actions as part of a long history of land redistribution efforts. While squatting in Roatán is illegal and conflicts with the island's distinct history of land ownership processes, it would be beneficial to acknowledge the Ladino rationale for claiming land in this way, as it would clarify for stakeholders the more specific causes of deforestation on the island. It would also be useful to frame Ladino land claiming in La Colonia as a result of crimes committed against them and as a result of the land grab occurring all over Honduras by powerful oligarchs. Additionally, Ladinos and Islanders are both politically and economically marginalized groups in Honduras. A reframing of the sources of instability in Roatán might help Islanders and Mainlanders join their political capital in an effort to mitigate the unequal power arrangements present in both tourism and agricultural development efforts.



Third, the island should revoke its efforts to make Roatán a “zero crime community” through widespread surveillance techniques. These efforts increase the likelihood of police corruption through the acceptance of bribes and do harm to already vulnerable island residents. Instead, the municipal government should work to reduce forms of social and economic immobilities, while strengthening local livelihood security. Strengthening local livelihood security is a complicated endeavor with mixed results, however, and must be approached with caution. For example, several years ago, the water taxis in Roatán created an association. Each boat received a number, a system was implemented where boat operators took turns shuttling tourists between parts of the island (based on their relative place in the number system), and an official dock was paid for and constructed by the association for the taxis to use. This helped cut down on competition between operators, standardized the price so taxis were not undercutting each other, and overall, organized livelihood efforts. By and large, the project seems to be a success.

However, formalizing livelihoods in this manner is not always successful in tourist destinations, as has been shown by numerous anthropologists. For example, Gregory (2014) notes that efforts in the Dominican Republic to require beachside vendors to obtain permits acted to exclude and disadvantage the working poor (who could not afford the cost) and caused further harm to their livelihood efforts (since they had to leave the most popular tourist beaches). Therefore, efforts to address the forms of (social, economic, and physical) immobilities I highlight in this dissertation should be careful not to inadvertently impose extra burdens for these individuals.

Fourth, the municipal government should continue supporting programs to address disappearing childhood – such as their attempt to establish a fund for local youth education from the proposed cruise ship passenger fee increase. Job training and quality education are key factors in reestablishing childhood as a protected time for young Honduran as they grow into adults.

In the meantime, many Hondurans must figure out how to build meaningful lives and survive under the constraints of enduring political, economic, and social forms of violence and immobility. The difficult choices surrounding migration and livelihoods were summed up well in an encounter I had with a Ladino taxi driver. I asked him about his thoughts on life on Roatán versus the mainland. He reflected on the situation for a bit, then answered by telling me, “On the mainland you can eat better...chicken, pork, every once in a while go out for a hamburger...even Kentucky.”

“Fried chicken?!” I interjected to clarify.

“Yes! So you understand me! Kentucky Fried Chicken. Basically, you can eat chicken in danger on the mainland, or you can eat beans and rice in safety on the island,” he explained.

As a graduate student earning my PhD at the University of Kentucky, I was always amused that Hondurans associated Kentucky (if they had heard of it at all) with Kentucky Fried Chicken. In this case, the taxi driver used “Kentucky” as shorthand for the fast food chain in general. I had never heard it referred to in this way, so I could not help but chuckle when it popped up in our conversation.

But the bigger point he demonstrated was that he understood the tradeoffs

between life on the mainland versus life in Roatán. You could afford better food on the mainland -- even enjoy the luxury of a hamburger or fried chicken on occasion. In Roatán, you could live a safer life, but would have to live off less money – eating beans and rice to survive. This encounter also demonstrates the differences between an outsider/etic view versus an insider/emic view of life in Roatán. While I observed serious and entrenched forms of violence and precarity present in the lives of Ladino migrants in Roatán, by and large, they viewed their lives on the island as much improved over their lives on the mainland.

The four major crises explored in this dissertation are well-known to most Hondurans. They coalesce in complex, overlapping ways to shape their daily lives. Mainland Hondurans must make hard decisions for themselves and their families about the costs versus benefits of living under these constraints. Yet, while these complexities shape Ladino decisions to migrate, they are rarely acknowledged by local stakeholders of Roatán's tourism industry. As a result, the important relationships between population growth and tourism instability are poorly understood.

I argue incorporating these considerations into the management of Roatán's tourism industry is timely and necessary. It is especially salient in light of the country's current political situation. For example, in November of 2017, Honduras held a presidential election. On the day of the election, as results were being announced by local television stations, all updates stopped abruptly. This happened after the challenger (Salavador Nasralla) to the incumbent president (Orlando Juan Hernandez) showed to be ahead in the polls. When election results resumed, they showed a reversal in results, with Hernandez winning the election. According to Gaouette (2017):

Early election results had shown opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla with a hefty lead with 60% of the vote counted, when public updates stopped for more than 24 hours and, when they resumed, showed the vote count steadily turning in favor of Hernandez.

Suspicious about the irregularity of election results spread quickly throughout Honduras, as activists took to the streets. Violent protests erupted as police attempted to suppress these efforts, with current estimates stating at least seventeen people have been killed as a result. Despite demands for transparency and a commitment to democracy by Hondurans, the U.S. formally recognized Hernandez as the Honduran president in January 2018, striking a blow to the Honduran democratic process.

The crises examined in this dissertation, which shape precarity in everyday Honduran life, will likely not only persist, but also worsen for Honduras' majority poor under broader constellations of economic and environmental instabilities. Hondurans continue to be in dire need of increased political representation (to address issues such as land rights; judicial corruption; sources of economic and social immobilities; and disappearing childhood). Many of these issues have come to shape everyday life in Roatán, although this fact is little acknowledged. I argue the recommendations I propose, while not equipped to address the scope and breadth of action needed to mitigate deeply entrenched forms of precarity, can still offer a roadmap for political will, to – at the very least – give a voice to silenced narratives of counter-progress and shine a light on the overlooked forces shaping island tourism.

#### Theoretical Applications of This Research

Prevailing approaches to the land grabbing question have tended to highlight certain regions and dimensions to the neglect of others. For instance, studies

generally focus on the role of foreign companies and foreign governments (primarily China, India, South Korea and the Gulf States) in the global land rush. This approach tends to miss or marginalize land grabs carried out by domestic and intra-regional capital, as well as the role of local elites and the state itself (Kerssen 2003, 120).

The case of the corporate expansion of palm oil in the Aguán Valley provides these lessons within the context of late capitalism's rush on the world's natural resources. The violent recourse to "accumulation by dispossession" behind today's land grabs in Honduras goes beyond popular media accounts of land deals by foreign investors (Kerssen 2003, 73).

This dissertation addresses the call by theorists (for example, Tsing 2015, Allison 2013, and Neilson & Rossiter 2008) for a simultaneous broadening *and* refinement of the theoretical lens of precarity, which incorporate into their analyses the novel features of contemporary capitalism. While much of my research findings are necessarily local in nature, the conditions shaping instability in Roatán's tourism industry stem from growing, intensifying forms of precarity at the global level. This precarity is provoked by features of contemporary capitalism, such as the coalescence of a failing global economy with a failing global ecology. For example, land expulsions are a significant feature of contemporary capitalism, as people all over the world are being forcibly removed from their lands and elite accumulation emerges from non-elite land dispossession. While most of these expulsions are brokered through corporate acquisitions of land, smaller-scale expulsions, such as those happening to Ladino Hondurans, are an overlooked, yet important facet of this growing global trend. In contrast to other forms of global land consolidation, expulsions in Honduras are primarily happening through the acquisition of land by powerful Honduran families who are taking lands held by poor rural farmers. What can be gleaned from my analysis of tourism instability in Roatán, is that anthropological investigations are imperative in understanding how broad-scale

uncertainty becomes locally recognizable through site-specific politics and histories.

While land disposessions (such as those seen in Honduras) fit a larger global trend, a robust understanding of how these disposessions affect the daily lives of Hondurans can only be understood through rich, localized analysis, that takes into account the country's long history of unequal land rights, coupled with a deep understanding of the current (environmental, social, and economic) processes of inequality taking place.

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## Curriculum Vita

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### EDUCATION

2009 M.A., Anthropology, University of Kentucky

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### PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

2015 - 2016 Editorial Assistant for the journal *Human Organization*.

#### Teaching

- Introduction to Anthropology, University of Kentucky (Primary Instructor, F2008)
- Cultural Diversity in the Modern World, University of Kentucky (Primary Instructor: Su 2011, T.A.: S2012, Su2010, F2007, S2007)
- Anthropology of Study Abroad, Kenyon College (Primary Instructor: Spring 2012)
- Culture, Environment and Global Problems, University of Kentucky (T.A.: F2011)
- Native Peoples of North America, University of Kentucky, (T.A.: S2011, S2009, S2008)
- Anthropology of Globalization, University of Kentucky (T.A.: F2010, Su2014)

### PUBLICATIONS

#### Book Chapter

2013 Tourism, Seafood Memories and Identity: Lessons from Roatán, Honduras. In *Food and Identity in the Caribbean*. Pp 45-56. Edited by Hanna Garth. Berg Publishers.

#### Thesis

2009 Neoliberal Development, Cruise Ship Tourism, and Community: Barriers to market entry for a small Alaska town.

## AWARDS

- 2013 Margaret Lantis Award for Excellence in Original Research by a Graduate Student. Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky.
- 2012 College of Arts and Sciences 2011-2012 Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award. University of Kentucky.
- 2012 William Y. Adams Award for Excellence in Teaching by a Graduate Student. Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky